

Family Voice is Critical This Year in the Rhode Island Legislative Session

Families and Youth are potentially the most powerful and effective voice with legislators. Your powerful stories and experiences can educate others to our cause and ensure that families of children at risk for or who have serious emotional, behavioral and/or mental health challenges, receive the necessary services and supports to be successful in their homes and communities. Parent Support Network (PSN) is a statewide family run organization dedicated to providing continuous support to families and youth by providing unconditional peer support; information and referral; education and training for families, community and state partners; and moving policy forward in order to meet the services needs of children, youth and their families.

It is urgent to start to share your voice now and until the legislative session ends in order to support our policy makers and legislators in making informed decisions and taking next steps in serving children, youth and their families.

There are many ways to have your voice heard. Most importantly is making contact with your local legislators. You are their constituents which means they work for you. It is your vote and your voice that provides them with the ability to support your needs. In this brief, PSN will provide you with information on ways to use your voice and share your stories with your legislators; how to contact your legislators and important committees; and provide some critical agenda items and information to empower families and youth to speak to.

Key policy and proposed legislative agenda items include:

- » DCYF will transfer all Medicaid services to DHS to be included as “in-plan” services under the Rite Care Program.
- » DCYF establishment of a Care Management Entity (CME) to assist DCYF staff in managing youth being served in high cost, out of state residential programs.
- » DCYF amending the upper age of jurisdiction for all youth to end at 18 versus 21
- » DCYF will limit placement at the Rhode Island Training School to youth detained and/or adjudicated prior to their 17th birthday with a sentence not to exceed their 18th birthday.
- » DCYF will eliminate Child Abuse/Neglect Investigations to youth age 16 and older with some special exceptions.
- » DCYF redesigning of system of care impacting CASSP, Project HOPE, Rhode Island Positive Educational Partnership, Children’s Emergency Services (CES), and Project Early Start (PES) and Title IVB.

How Can I Use My Voice and Share Stories and Important Information?

Find out who your local legislators are.

There are a few ways you can learn this if you do not already know. You can visit the legislative home page at <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/> or <http://www.sec.state.ri.us/vic/> to learn about how to contact your local legislators by phone, mail and/or email. It will be important to know who the Senate and House Leaders and Committee Chairs are. This site provides information about all legislative activities, including who all the legislators are and their contact information. You may also call Parent Support Network and we will be happy to support you in connecting with your legislators, at 467-6855 or 1-800-483-8844.

Think about the message you want your legislators to hear.

Keep it simple and support your message in writing if you are able to, but no longer than one page. Let your legislator know who you are, where you live and please share that you are affiliated with the Parent Support Network if you are member. It is also important to provide your phone number or a way to contact you if your legislators would like to follow up with you. Share your story and/or knowledge around specific service and support needs that you want to ensure continue. It is important to share successes and challenges, be polite and proactive, but present the realities. Always follow-up with a thank you.

Ways to contact your legislators.

You can write to your legislators (see sample letter) and now is a critical time. You can call your legislators by contacting their direct offices. You can also email. Setting up appointments to meet with your legislators can have a huge impact. Staying informed to when certain bills and budget issues are being heard and discussed is important so that you can testify. The Parent Support Network can support you with all of this.

To Join our Email list to receive up to date information, send an email to T.Casey@psnri.org

Children's Behavioral Health psychiatric services: Children's Intensive Services (CIS) and Residential to move to the Department of Human Services RIte Care Health Plans

It is proposed that the Medicaid transfer of psychiatric services from the DCYF budget to the DHS budget, shifting services to become "in-plan" services under the RIte Care Program in order to save an estimated \$42 million dollars. This will affect services such as Children's Intensive Services (CIS), hospitalization and residential treatment programs. PSN supports many families

who at times have had to turn to DCYF in order to financially meet their child or youth's behavioral health care needs. If this change is to occur it would mean that families who are on RIte Care would access the behavioral health services offered by their health plans, which includes Neighborhood, United and Blue Chip. Questions families are raising are what if I am not currently on RIte Care? Will I have the same access to services and will the quality remain the same? Will my provider change? It will be important to ask what these in plan services will look like and to educate state policy makers, legislators, Department of Human Services, DCYF about your service needs and how this change will impact you.

It is also proposed that in addition to this system of care redesign that DCYF is working on the establishment of a Care Management Entity (CME) to assist DCYF staff in managing the service needs for youth who are now being served in high-cost, out-of state residential programs.

Department of Children, Youth and Families to Eliminate Services to Youth ages 18 to 21 years old, by July 2007

It is proposed to amend the upper age of jurisdiction of all youth involved with DCYF to end at age 18: Currently DCYF can serve youth until age 21 provided that they are in DCYF care and custody prior to their 18th birthday. This amendment would end services to youth at age 18 regardless of whether they are involved with DCYF due to child welfare, juvenile justice or behavioral health reasons. Some of these youth may be eligible for adult services. This will seriously impact the current 857 youth over age 18 involved with DCYF. This will mean them losing opportunities for college and continuing education, housing, and health insurance. Many youth are concerned about finding employment, becoming homeless or even finding themselves in trouble with the law. The Rhode Island Foster Parents Association has been supporting youth to share their voices on this important legislative change. For more information how youth can get involved contact RIFPA at 438-3900 x101 or Ocean State Action at 463-5368.

For Support or more information about any of these key concerns and messages please feel free to contact PSN at 467-6855 or 1- 800-483-8844.

Limit Placement at the Rhode Island Training School to Youth to up to age 17 and then a world of Adult Corrections

It is proposed to limit placement at the Rhode Island Training School to youth detained and/or adjudicated prior to their 17th birthday with a sentence not to exceed their 18th birthday. This proposal limits Family Court jurisdiction to adjudicate juvenile justice cases to youth under the age of 17. Concerns expressed by youth and family members include safety of youth that are

placed in adult corrections, especially those with significant mental health needs and having to have an adult record starting at age 17. Youth expressed concern about how they would be supported to continue their education, especially if they are receiving special education services.

Elimination of investigations for youth 16 years old and up, unless there are allegations of sexual abuse or institutional abuse

It is proposed to eliminate Child Abuse/Neglect Investigations to youth age 16 or older with some exceptions: Under this proposal, investigations of incidents involving youth age 16 and over would be referred to local police departments, with the exception of allegations involving sexual abuse and/or sexual exploitation as well as those alleging institutional abuse/neglect. Youth have expressed concern about where will they go, when they are worried about domestic violence situations and if their parents are not accepting of their sexual identity.

Department of Children, Youth and Families, ASO Redesign Efforts

The Department of Children, Youth and Families is working toward development of an Integrated Family and Community System of Care. In preparation for issuing a request for proposals, a concept paper for this initiative is available for public review and comment at:

<http://www.dcyf.state.ri.us/> Or you could request a copy of the concept paper from Parent Support Network (PSN) staff. You may submit your comments to Lee.Baker@dcyf.ri.gov no later than March 1, 2007. The reorganization is designed to provide more timely access to family preservation services to children at risk of abuse and neglect, and a broader range of community supports for families with children who suffer from serious emotional disturbance. This will impact how services and supports are currently being delivered. There are six programs that will be impacted in this redesign: Child and Adolescent Service Systems Programs (CASSP); Children's Emergency Services (CES); Project Early Start (PES); Project HOPE; Positive Educational Partnerships (PEP); and Title IV-B. This redesign model speaks to creating a regionally coordinated system of care that combines care coordination with the wraparound process and flexible funding. This redesign speaks to developing Family and Community Advisory Boards to guide and oversee the development of the service system at the local and state level. DCYF has funded the eight Local Coordinating Councils up to now to perform similar functions. If you are currently impacted by changes to these six programs share with DCYF what has been valuable and important not to lose in the redesign. It is important to become educated about these redesign concepts. Watch for an announcement of a regional forum in your community to provide additional input.

SAMPLE LETTER

Date

Legislator

Committee/Position

State House or Legislator Mailing Address

(Found on <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/Email/>)

Dear Senator or Representative:

Share who you are and if you are a youth or a family member; describe your own or child's needs; and share where you live in relationship to your legislative voting district.

Share your story or key concerns. Refer to specific agenda areas or bills you are concerned with.

Tell your legislator what you want him/her to do and ask for a response. Request a meeting with your legislator or a return phone call.

Sincerely,

Name

Address

Phone number and/or Email