



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: H5421 Re: Amendment to the Constitution -- Right to an Adequate Education

House Committee on State Government and Elections

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Bill 5421. If this bill is passed, an amendment to the state's Constitution would be placed before the voters this fall which would state that all Rhode Islanders must be provided with an equal opportunity to receive an education that is "adequate to permit them to achieve at high levels and to become lifelong learners, productive workers, and responsible citizens" and that this right is judicially enforceable.

At Rhode Island KIDS COUNT we strongly believe that all children in our state deserve access to a high-quality public education from Pre-K through college. Education is the gateway to opportunity for children and families and is vital to the economic prosperity of our state, and the quality of a student's education should not depend on the zip code or city in which they live.

In recent years, Rhode Island has taken a number of steps to ensure that all children have access to the kind of high-quality education they need to succeed in school, career, and life. One of these key steps was instituting an education funding formula that is based on five key principles – equity, adequacy, predictability, accountability, and efficiency and later improving this funding formula to provide additional funds to support the additional needs of Multilingual Learners, although more support is needed in this area. Another key step was developing a Basic Education Plan (BEP) that outlines the rights of every student in the Rhode Island public education system and sets basic standards to help ensure that high-quality education is available to all public school students, regardless of where they live or go to school.

Even after these important steps, we know that there are still inequities between school districts and that many of the school districts that serve high numbers of low-income students, students of color, and Multilingual Learner students struggle to meet the requirements of the BEP. Passing this bill would help close the gaps that remain, ensure that all children receive the high-quality educational opportunities they need to succeed in today's high-skills economy, and provide a judicial enforcement mechanism to ensure compliance.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for all you do on behalf of the children and youth of Rhode Island.