



Testimony Re: House Bill 6666 Re: Access to High-Speed Internet
House Education Committee
January 26, 2022
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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 6666. This bill would require school districts to provide high-speed internet to all public school students upon request and would establish a fund administered by the Rhode Island Department of Education to reimburse school districts for providing this service.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated unacceptable and persistent inequities in education and has shed light on how essential computers and access to high-speed internet are for educational success. Computers and high-speed internet connect students to distance learning during school closures and illness, assist students in completing homework assignments, and allow students and families to communicate with teachers.

Rhode Island schools made valiant efforts to provide laptops to all students during the pandemic, and the Rhode Island Department of Education partnered with the Rhode Island Foundation, Brown University, corporations, and individual donors to provide low or no-cost internet to low-income families during school closures and the 2020-2021 school year. The use of computers and internet remains integral to the educational experience even as schools have adjusted back to in-person instruction.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2019, 84% of Rhode Island fourth grade public school students reported having internet access and a computer or tablet at home.

Children in low-income families may have limited access to high-speed internet due to the financial circumstances creating unequal educational opportunities. As of October 1, 2020, 46% (64,025) of public school students in Rhode Island were low-income (students who were eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program). Low-income students are represented in every school district in Rhode Island.

To achieve equity in education, we urge the Committee to recommend passage of House Bill 6666 with revision to the bill to include preschool/Pre-K students that are served by the public schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.