



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: House Bill 5282, An Act Relating To Education -- The Education Equity And Property Tax Relief Act

House Committee on Finance

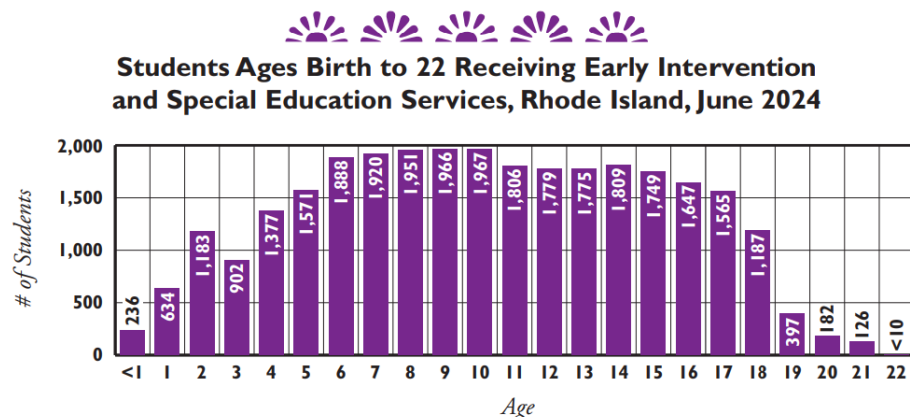
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We would like to thank Representative Donovan for sponsoring this important bill and Representatives Speakman, Cotter, Carson, Cortvriend, Messier, Edwards, and Morales for co-sponsoring. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Bill 5282, which would amend the calculation of state funding provided to local education agencies for special education services.

Over the years, Rhode Island has taken several steps to ensure that all children have access to the high-quality education they need to succeed in **school, career, and life**. In 2010, the General Assembly enacted the state's first education funding formula which was based on five key principles – equity, adequacy, predictability, accountability, and efficiency. We thank the General Assembly leadership and the Finance Committee for all your hard work to establish the funding formula through legislation, to ensure that it is fully funded, and to seek improvements to the formula to better meet the needs of Rhode Island students.

The federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) guarantees a free appropriate public education to every child with a disability. As of June 2024, there were 23,574 students in grades K-12 (18% of all kindergarten through grade 12 students) receiving special education services through Rhode Island public schools.



Source: Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Center for Child and Family Health, Early Intervention enrollment, June 30, 2024. Rhode Island Department of Education, Office of Diverse Learners, Special Education Census, June 30, 2024. Includes parentally placed students.

Concerns remain that not all children who could benefit from services are identified, that Children of Color are less likely to receive special education services than their white peers, and that special education funding is not adequate. Additionally, despite improvements in high school graduation rates and postsecondary school enrollment, students with disabilities are still less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to be suspended than students without disabilities.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports efforts to identify and remove systemic barriers to educational services and opportunities for students with special education needs and urges for these efforts to be adequately resourced.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.