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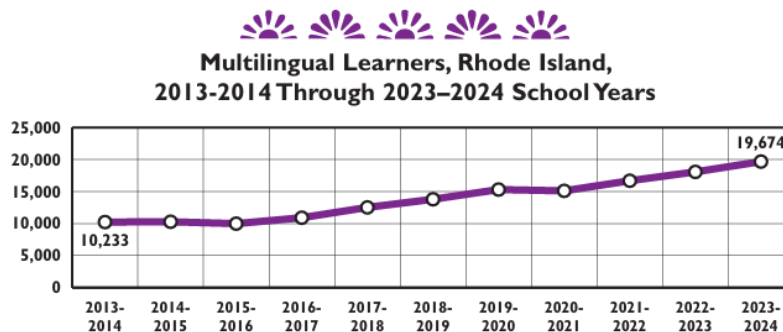
Testimony Re: House Bill 5744- BILINGUAL, DUAL LANGUAGE AND WORLD LANGUAGE TEACHERS INVESTMENT ACT

House Finance Committee

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Chairmen and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 5744 and thank Representative Morales for sponsoring and Representatives Diaz, Alzate, Giraldo, Stewart, Carson, Dawson, Handy, O'Brien, Ajello for co-sponsoring. This bill would allow the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner to broaden the certification of bilingual, dual language, and world language teachers in urban core and surrounding public schools by creating two scholarship programs—one for college students and another for current teachers. It outlines specific eligibility and distribution guidelines for Rhode Island College (RIC) and the University of Rhode Island (URI). Additionally, the bill would allow charitable contributions to the scholarship fund and require the General Assembly to allocate \$1 million annually to support the program.

As the local population, economy, and workforce continue to change, there has been a shift in how cities and towns nationwide support Multilingual Learners/English Learners (MLL). Rhode Island has taken several steps to ensure that all children have access to high-quality education and to recognize multilingualism as an asset. These critical steps included incorporating MLL funding into the core funding formula, updating the MLL regulations for the first time in 17 years to better align with federal standards and implementing the Seal of Biliteracy which allows high school students who receive the Silver or Gold Seal of Biliteracy to earn college credits towards a minor or major degree in a world language at the state's public higher education institutions.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2013-2014 through 2023-2024 school years.

During the 2023-2024 school year in Rhode Island, MLL students were 14% (19,674) of the total student population. The number of MLL students in Rhode Island has almost doubled (increased by 92%) from the 2013-2014 to 2023-2024 school years. Rhode Island experienced the highest growth rate of MLL students in the nation between 2010 and 2020. By 2020, 12.2% of its student population were MLLs, ranking fifth highest among all states. Compared to New England states, Rhode Island has the largest percentage of MLL students. Yet, in October 2024, 2% (166) of Rhode Island public school teachers and instructional coordinators held an active Bilingual, Dual Language, or English to Speakers of Other Languages certification.

Investing in adults who are interested in becoming bilingual and world language educators is not only a smart educational strategy, but also an economic one. As Rhode Island's MLL student population continues to grow, so does the demand for educators who can effectively teach and support them. By creating pathways and incentives for adults to become certified in these areas, we are strengthening our local workforce, increasing access to high-demand, good-paying jobs, and ensuring our schools are equipped to meet the needs of all students. Supporting this pipeline benefits our economy by building a more inclusive, linguistically diverse education system that prepares students to thrive.

We thank the General Assembly for their continued commitment to equity in education and urge your support for this bill, which will help grow a diverse pipeline of bilingual and world language educators. By investing in future and current teachers, this legislation recognizes the value of linguistic and cultural diversity in our schools and helps ensure that all students, especially multilingual learners have access to high-quality education.