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## Testimony Re: House Bill 5982- AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION -- SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION

House Finance Committee

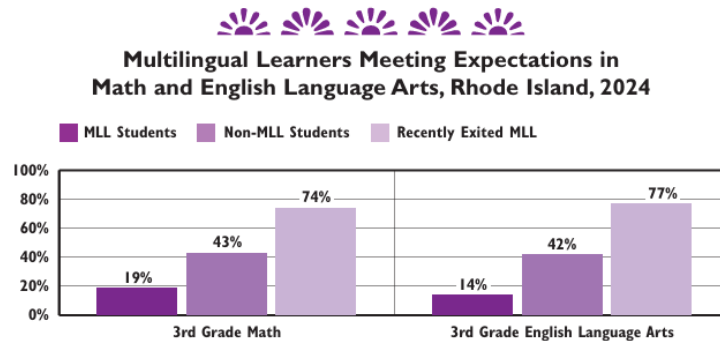
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Jessica Senior Advocacy & Community Engagement Manger

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 5982 and thank Representative Felix for sponsoring and Representatives Morales, Alzate, Diaz, Potter, Tanzi, Sanchez, Kislak, Batista, and Cruz for co-sponsoring. This bill would provide \$300,000 to start a dual language program fund at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. It would also help carry out the Support and Access to Bilingual Education (SABE) Act for all school districts that receive funding.

Rhode Island has made meaningful progress to ensure all children receive a high-quality education and to elevate multilingualism as an asset. Key actions include incorporating Multilingual Learner (MLL) funding into the state's core education funding formula, **updating MLL regulations for the first time in 17 years to align with federal standards—emphasizing the expansion of dual language programs**—and adopting the Seal of Biliteracy. This seal allows high school students who earn a Silver or Gold designation to receive college credit toward a minor or major in a world language at Rhode Island's public colleges and universities.

◆ The number of MLL students in Rhode Island has almost doubled (increased by 92%) from the 2013-2014 to 2023-2024 school years.<sup>19</sup>



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, October 2024.

During the 2023-2024 school year in Rhode Island, MLL students were 14% (19,674) of the total student population. Although, the potential for these students are endless they do require extra supports. Rhode Island experienced the highest growth rate of MLL students in the nation between 2010 and 2020. MLLs/ELs are the fastest-growing groups of students in large urban districts and many smaller cities and suburban communities. In 2024, 19% of third-grade MLL/EL students met

expectations in math, compared to 43% of non-MLL students, and 14% met expectations in English language arts on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, compared to 42% of non-MLL students. In addition, the overall four-year high school graduation rate for the Class of 2024 was 84%, while the rate for MLLs/ELs was only 74%.

Dual language programs involve students engaging in material in two languages (e.g., students spend half the day learning English and half learning in another language). Researchers have shown promising results in using dual language programs, particularly in low-income communities. **Dual language programs can improve English reading proficiency, decrease dropout rates, increase the likelihood of going to college, and improve economic outcomes for MLL/EL students.**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT was pleased to serve on the Blueprint for Multilingual Learner (MLL) Success Team convened by the Rhode Island Department of Education alongside dedicated students, parents, educators, and community stakeholders to identify, implement, and sustain more effective policies and practices for MLL students in Rhode Island. This bill aligns with the Blueprint's strategic plan to secure and fund evidence-based, sustained, and purposeful MLL professional learning for all educators and leaders across and within systems and expanding high-quality dual language programs.

We thank the General Assembly for their commitment to Rhode Island students and ask you to support this bill which will celebrate the cultural and language diversity these students bring to our classrooms and ensure that all children have access to the high-quality education they need to succeed in school, career, and life.