



Testimony Re: House Bill 8336, An Act Relating to Education -- Rhode Island Hope Scholarship Pilot Program
House Finance Committee
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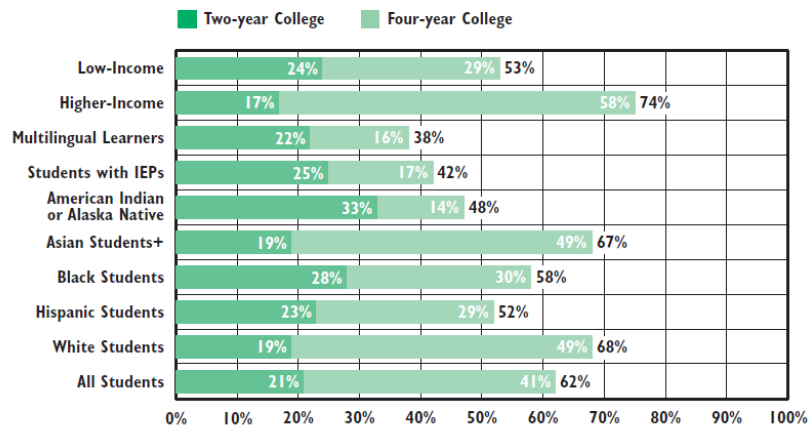
Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We would also like to thank Representative McNamara for sponsoring this important bill and Representatives Alzate, Hull, Shanley, O'Brien, Phillips, Bennett, Batista, Azzinaro, and Noret for co-sponsoring. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is in support of House Bill 8336 which would make the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship a permanent program. The state's economic success depends on a highly educated and skilled workforce, and this success depends on the state's ability to make educational opportunities beyond high school accessible for more students.

Between 2023 and 2033, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education. Between 2020 and 2024 in Rhode Island, adults with high school diplomas were nearly three times as likely to be unemployed as those with bachelor's degrees or higher, and the median annual income for adults with high school diplomas was \$44,395, compared to \$70,290 for adults with bachelor's degrees.

Many students, especially low-income students, face barriers to college enrollment and completion, such as insufficient academic preparation, difficulty navigating the application and financial aid processes, and the high cost of college. There continue to be large gaps in college access, particularly four-year college enrollment. For example, in 2025 29% of low-income students immediately enrolled in a four-year institution compared to 58% of higher-income students. **Rhode Island students, especially our low-income students, need a four-year option that is accessible and affordable.**



Immediate College Enrollment by Family Income, Race, Ethnicity, and Type of College, Class of 2025, Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2025. Percentages may not sum exactly due to rounding. +Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across

In Rhode Island, there are also large gaps in college completion between low-income and higher-income students, with 37% of low-income students completing college within six years, compared to 72% of higher-income students. There are also large disparities by race and ethnicity, language status, and disability.

Converting the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship into a permanent program will likely increase the percentage of low-income students and Students of Color enrolling at Rhode Island College and make a four-year college experience more accessible to these students. Students who receive financial aid generally have lower dropout rates than non-aided students, but dropout rates vary depending on the amount and timing of student financial aid.

Affordability may not be the only barrier to increasing Rhode Island's college enrollment and completion rates, but it is essential. Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown in investing in children from birth through college and investing in the education and training of our state's workforce. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony, and we urge passage.