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Testimony Re: Budget Article 5, Question 2 Relating to Rhode Island School Buildings

House Finance Committee

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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 strong support for Budget Article 5, Question 2, the School Construction Bond.

Article 5, Question 2

Article 5 submits budget referenda to the Rhode Island voters for their approval, including Question 2 which provides \$250 million in public obligation bonds for the construction, renovation, and rehabilitation of Rhode Island public schools. The state cannot issue more than \$250 million in notes over a five-year period and not more than \$100 million in notes in any single year.

The necessity of this investment was made clear both in the *State of Rhode Island Schoolhouses* report that was released in September 2017 and during the follow-up research and analysis conducted by the Rhode Island School Building Authority.

The *State of Rhode Island Schoolhouses* report, a year-long assessment of the status of our state's school facilities, found that only 12.4% of school buildings are in good to average condition and determined that \$627.6 million in high-priority construction and repairs is needed just to address building safety and code compliance issues. A total of \$2.2 billion in funding will be needed to bring all school buildings into ideal condition.

We know that the condition of school facilities affects the learning and behavior of students and teachers. We cannot have world-class education in Rhode Island without facilities to support learning and teaching.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is pleased with the recent adjustments to the Pay-As-You-Go funding distribution formula of the 2018 school construction bond to ensure communities with fewer financial resources can utilize these voter-approved funds.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the connection between school facilities like heating and ventilation systems, public health, and learning

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environments. School leaders worked diligently to make school buildings safer for students and staff to return to in-person learning, however, these efforts are temporary and do not replace the need for ongoing investment in meaningful improvements to the conditions of Rhode Island public school buildings.

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown on this issue. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.