



**Testimony Re: H-7676 Relating to State Affairs and Government – Open Meetings**

**House State Government & Elections Committee**

**March 31, 2026**

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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports Representative Speakman’s bill H-7676** which would amend the state Open Meetings law to permit members of a public advisory body to participate in open meetings remotely using videoconferencing technology, including voting to finalize advisory recommendations for consideration by policymakers.

It would also require city/town councils and school committees to offer members of the public the opportunity to attend meetings remotely through video conferencing and offer public comments through video conference technology just as members of the public are allowed to make comments in person at the meeting.

It is important to modernize the state’s Open Meetings law to incorporate new technology that was successfully used in Rhode Island for several years during the COVID-19 pandemic and has been permanently adopted by other states to support the public’s ability to make recommendations that inform policymakers’ decisions.

**From 2010 through 2024, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinated and staffed the RI Early Learning Council, a [state public advisory body required under federal law](#) and charged with developing recommendations to improve state early childhood development and care systems. The Early Learning Council includes parents of young children, early childhood teachers, early childhood program administrators, superintendents, pediatricians, and others who often struggle to find time to and face barriers preventing them from participating in state meetings. **Beginning in 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we successfully used video conferencing technology to sustain and even expand the involvement of community members in the Early Learning Council’s discussions and development of recommendations.** The meetings have continued through hybrid options but members who participate remotely have not counted towards a quorum and cannot vote to finalize recommendations.**

**Parents, families, and frontline staff are the best advocates to influence policies and budgets that help children thrive and they face real logistical barriers to participating in public meetings.** Offering remote participation options helps parents of young children and frontline staff serve on advisory committees and share their experiences and recommendations without requiring them to find child care and transportation.

Videoconferencing also **helps state planning committees more easily engage participants people who live in more remote areas of the state and people who are not fluent in English.** Simultaneous interpretation

works very well with a skilled interpreter through videoconference technology.

We know there are challenges associated with using technology to offer virtual meetings, but the benefits associated with allowing participation by families and individuals who are impacted by policy decisions outweigh the challenges.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We support all efforts that help families with children and frontline staff participate in meetings and influence decisions to improve policies and programs for children and youth.