



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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**Testimony Re: House Bill 5622-Rhode Island Public Transit Authority
House Finance Committee**

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Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice our support for House Bill 5622 Representatives Felix for sponsoring and Representatives Morales, Alzate, J. Lombardi, Diaz, Batista, Cruz, Sanchez, Henriques, and Speakman for co-sponsoring. This bill would prohibit the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) from imposing any fares and/or charges for service provided to the general public.

In October of 2022, 1.1 million Rhode Islanders were reported to utilize RIPTA buses for their daily activities, including getting to work, school, and medical appointments, among other necessities. According to the Urban Institute, the lack of reliable and affordable public transportation increases unemployment rates, decreases economic mobility, and is linked to the likelihood of using public assistance. In addition, transportation expenses negatively affect low-income households, particularly single families, who are overburdened with the cost of childcare, and potentially exclude them from participating in their children's education, for example, the ability to attend parent-teacher conferences.

In contrast, access to public transportation can reduce barriers to employment, increase access to health care services, and supports educational enrichment opportunities for children and youth. For example, free RIPTA buses will allow students to participate in more out-of-school programs, work-based activities, and internships. This helps minimize the opportunity gaps between low-income and high-income students.

Nationwide many cities have adopted a free bus fare program. However, Rhode Island could become the first state to implement a statewide free public transportation system for its constituency.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.