



## Testimony Re: House Bill 5638- LANGUAGE ACADEMIES ACT

House Finance Committee

April 25, 2023

Jessica Vega, Senior Policy Analyst



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**

ONE UNION STATION  
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903  
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT wants to voice our **opposition** to House Bill 5638. This bill would establish language academies for non-English proficient students and create a statewide property tax on all colleges, universities, and other post-secondary schools to fund the academies.

The U.S. has had a history of segregation. In the 19th century, Native Americans were segregated into boarding schools that forced them to assimilate. The history of redlining also caused residential segregation, creating significant gaps in academic access and attainment for Students of Color. While policies that created segregated schools ended decades ago, America and Rhode Island have yet to see a truly integrated educational system that produces high-quality educational opportunities for all.

While we understand the bill intends to support Multilingual Learners/English Learners (MLL), the impact, however, would segregate this subgroup of students. Most MLL/EL students already live in highly segregated communities. The largest group of MLLs in Rhode Island are Latinos. During the 2020-2021 school year, 81% of MLL students in Rhode Island spoke Spanish, 70% attended schools in the four core cities, and 79% were enrolled in free or reduced-price lunch programs.

**The reality is that segregating students does not help improve their educational attainment—students who are enrolled in schools that are both racially and socioeconomically diverse score higher on test scores.** Additionally, dual language programs have demonstrated positive outcomes for MLL/EL students, improving English reading proficiency, decreasing dropout rates, increasing the likelihood of college enrollment, and improving economic outcomes. What makes dual language programs successful is how they embrace the culture of MLL/EL students and promote social integration and

cohesion by **fostering relationship-building among students from different cultures and backgrounds.**

MLL students are best taught through an asset-based approach that supports their linguistic capabilities, celebrates the rich culture they bring to the classroom through materials that reflect their identities and experiences, and creates a culture where their multilingualism is viewed as a strength and educators expect success. Segregating these students will have the unintended consequence of further disenfranchising this group of students.

We urge the General Assembly not to pass this bill and instead invest in proven methods that lead to better outcomes. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.