



Testimony Re: H-5722 Relating to State Affairs
and Government – Open Meetings
House State Govt. & Elections Committee
April 5, 2023
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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that will help families with young children.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign strongly support Representative Caldwell's bill H-5722 which would amend the state Open Meetings law to permit members of a public body that is advisory in nature to participate remotely using videoconferencing technology in open public meetings of the public body.

It would also require policymaking bodies such as school committees to offer members of the public the opportunity to attend meetings remotely through video conferencing and offer comments through video conference during designated periods.

It is important to modernize the state's Open Meetings law to incorporate new technology that has been successfully used for several years during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to be widely used to hold efficient meetings and allows more members of the public to advise policymakers.

Parents and families 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 would help parents of young children to serve on advisory committees and to share their experiences and recommendations with public bodies without requiring they find child care and transportation.

Videoconferencing also helps state planning committees to more easily engage participants who have difficulty with transportation, people who live in more remote areas of the state, and people who are not fluent in English. Simultaneous interpretation works very well using Zoom technology and hiring a skilled interpreter. 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 on this important topic. We support all efforts that help families with children participate in meetings that can influence decision that will improve policies and programs for children and youth.