



**Testimony Re: Senate Bill 0178 An Act Relating to Education-
Apprenticeships**

Senate Education Committee

April 18, 2023

Paige Clausius-Parks, Executive Director

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to be voice our support for Senate Bill 0178 and thank Senator Gallo for sponsoring it and Senators Pearson, DiPalma, Euer, Felag, Valverde, Lawson, and Zurier for co-sponsoring. This bill enables an individual to earn a bachelor's degree at a public higher education institution by earning credits through apprenticeships.

In Rhode Island, between 2017 and 2021, the unemployment rate for adults ages 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher was 3.1%, compared with 6.5% for high school graduates and 10.4% for those with less than a high school diploma. Additionally, Youth of Color (with the exception of Asian youth) are more likely to be disconnected from school and work than white youth. Expanding apprenticeship programs can help create an inclusive economy for all Rhode Islanders.

An apprenticeship allows individuals to access paid work-based learning opportunities while setting them on the path to earning college credits or entering the workforce with the advantage of having the technical skills employers seek. These programs often pay higher wages and provide mentors, which is critical to increasing access to quality jobs. These programs also benefit Youth of Color, Multilingual Learners, and Newcomer students who, out of the necessity to work, often miss school or drop out altogether to support their families.

Apprenticeship opportunities can start as early as high school, offering young people the ability to learn, make a living, and earn college credit, while minimizing the need for student loans. In fact, in 2022, the Biden Administration launched the *Raise the Bar: Unlocking Career Success* initiative and partnered with the U.S. Departments of Commerce and Labor to develop best practices for schools to increase and expand high-quality workforce training programs through K-12.

We applaud the General Assembly for taking an innovative approach to how Rhode Islanders learn and work. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.