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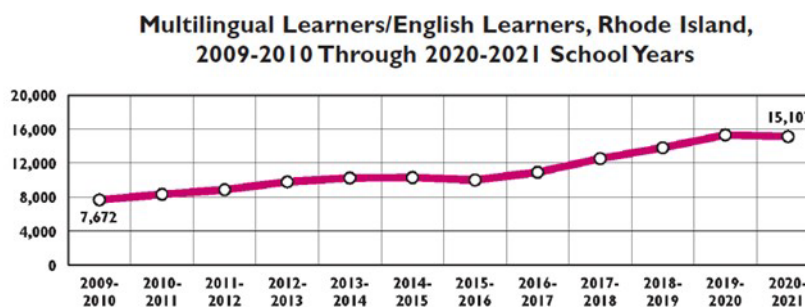
**Testimony Re: Senate Bill 0559- Multilingual Educators Investment Act**  
**Senate Finance Committee**

**May 9, 2023**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for Senate Bill 0559 and thank Senator Cano for sponsoring, and Senators Cano, Acosta, Euer, DiMario, Murray, Mack, Quezada, Pearson, Gallo, and Burke for co-sponsoring. This bill would establish a program to expand the issuance of teaching certificates to bilingual dual language and world language teachers in urban and urban ring schools through a scholarship program.

As the local population, economy, and workforce continue to change, there has been a shift in how cities and towns nationwide support Multilingual Learners/English Learners (MLLs/ELs). Rhode Island has taken several steps to ensure that all children have access to high-quality education and to recognize multilingualism as an asset. These critical steps included instituting categorical funds to support MLLs/ELs, although more support is needed in this area, and implementing the Seal of Biliteracy which allows high school students who receive the Silver or Gold Seal of Biliteracy to earn college credits towards a minor or major degree in a world language at the state's public higher education institutions.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2009-2010 through 2020-2021 school years.

During the 2020-2021 school year, there were 15,107 MLL/EL students in Rhode Island, representing 11% of all students enrolled in public school from preschool through grade 12. MLLs/ELs are the fastest-growing group of students in large urban districts and many smaller cities and suburban districts. For example, from the 2009-2010 school year to the 2020-2021 school year, **the percentage of Newport MLL/EL students grew from 3% to 16%**. In our newest [Issue Brief Multilingual Learners in Rhode Island](#), we reported on the

educational outcomes and disparities that exist within this subgroup of students. In 2022, 14% of third grade MLL/EL students met expectations in math and 10% met expectations in English language arts on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*. The scores were even lower in eighth grade when less than 5% of MLL/EL students met expectations in math and English language arts. In addition, the overall four-year graduation rate for the Class of 2021 in Rhode Island was 84% while the rate for MLLs/ELs was only 69%.

Dual language programs involve students engaging in material in two languages (e.g., students spend half the day learning English and half learning in another language). Researchers have shown promising results in using dual language programs, particularly in low-income communities. Dual language programs can improve English reading proficiency, decrease dropout rates, increase the likelihood of going to college, and improve economic outcomes for MLL/EL students. However, during the 2020-2021 school year, **only 5% (510) of Rhode Island public school teachers and instructional coordinators held an active Bilingual, Dual Language, or English to Speakers of Other Languages certification**. This is why it's crucial to increase the pipeline of dual language and world language educators who speak the language and have the cultural context to relate and connect with students and their families.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT was pleased to serve on the Blueprint for Multilingual Learner (MLL) Success Team convened by the Rhode Island Department of Education alongside dedicated students, parents, educators, and community stakeholders to identify, implement, and sustain more effective policies and practices for MLL students in Rhode Island. This bill aligns with the Blueprint's strategic plan to **secure and fund evidence-based, sustained, and purposeful MLL professional learning for all educators and leaders across and within systems and expanding high- quality dual language programs**.

We thank the General Assembly for their commitment to Rhode Island students and ask you to support this bill which will celebrate the cultural and language diversity these students bring to our classrooms and ensure that all children have access to the high-quality education they need to succeed in school, career, and life.