



Testimony Re: Article 15 Relating to Human Services- RI Works

Senate Finance Committee

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports Article 15, Section 7** which would change the definition of dependent child so youth in families enrolled in Rhode Island Works can continue to receive cash assistance when they turn 18 if they are still in high school. This change would allow youth who are expected to graduate on time to stay in school and will also support youth who are on a longer trajectory to high school completion and expected to get their diploma in five or six years. Of the 9,956 Rhode Island students who enrolled in ninth grade in 2013, 84% graduated in four years, but some needed additional time to complete their degrees; 279 (3%) graduated in five years in 2018, and 40 (<1%) graduated in six years in 2019. Of the 279 students who graduated in five years in 2018, 234 (84%) were low-income students. Of the 40 students who graduated in six years in 2019, 32 (80%) were low-income students. Without this change, youth may feel pressure to drop out of high school and go to work to contribute funds to support their families.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports Article 15, Section 8 which would allow adults in the Rhode Island Works program to work and not have their earned income count against their benefit for six months or until their family income exceeds 185% of the federal poverty level or they reach their 48-month lifetime time limit. This change would help parents receiving Rhode Island Works maintain family stability while they are moving into the workforce.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT also **strongly supports** the following proposed changes to the RI Works program which are supported by The Raising RI Coalition, a group of community, healthcare, social service and advocacy organizations that serve low-income families and are working to ensure that families can meet their basic needs:

- A statutory change to the **children's clothing allowance** permitting the Rhode Island Department of Human Services to provide the annual clothing allowance to all children, including infants and toddlers. In December 2019, 42% of the children enrolled in RI Works were under the age of six. Including these children in the clothing allowance would provide relief to families living in deep poverty.
- Incremental **increase of the RI Works benefit** from 31% of the federal poverty level (\$554 for a family of 3) to 50% (\$905) within two years. The current benefit amount provides \$6 per person per day and has not been increased in almost 30 years. The loss of employment in low-income households due to COVID-19 is expected to impact economic mobility and have devastating long-lasting effects on children in poverty. We urge the committee to consider raising the monthly benefit

to help very low-income families meet their basic needs and to continue to receive work supports including employment services and subsidized child care.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today.

