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Testimony Re: House Bill 7292 Re: Strategies to Recruit Teachers of Color

House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare

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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 House Bill 7292 which would allow the Commissioner of education to implement strategies to reach the goal of hiring 200 new teachers of color by 2025 and authorizes Rhode Island Housing to administer programs for mortgage assistance to qualifying teachers.

Closing unacceptable, wide and persistent gaps for students of color, low-income students, students with disabilities and Multilingual/ English Language Learners must be Rhode Island's most urgent educational priority. Supporting the recruitment and retention of a diverse pool of educators is an important step in addressing these gaps.

Rhode Island's student population is increasingly diverse, yet only a small fraction of Rhode Island teachers are teachers of color. Data is needed to track the number and percentage of teachers of color. In October 2018, 57% of Rhode Island public school students were non-Hispanic White, 26% were Hispanic, 9% were Black, 3% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% were Multi-Racial, and 1% were Native American while 89% of Rhode Island educators identified as White. Our educators and school leadership should reflect the rich diversity of the children they serve. Encouraging more people of color to enter education can increase cultural competencies and reduce significant disparities in suspension rates and decrease barriers between parents, communities and schools.

In recent years, Rhode Island has taken a number of steps to ensure that all children have access to the kind of high-quality education they need to succeed in school, career, and life. These key steps included instituting an education funding formula that is based on five key principles – equity, adequacy, predictability, accountability, and efficiency and later improving this funding formula to provide additional funds to support the additional needs of Multilingual/English Learners, although more support is needed in this area. Another key step was developing a Basic Education Plan (BEP) that outlines the rights of every student in the Rhode Island public education system and sets basic standards to help ensure that high-quality education is available to all public school students, regardless of where they live or go to school.

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Even after these important steps, we know that there are still inequities. Rhode Island needs to encourage more young people of color to pursue careers in education but also to take more immediate action to recruit more educators of color to Rhode Island and support them to ensure that they stay in the field of education.

We thank Representative Alzate and members of the Legislative Commission to Study and Provide Recommendations for Encouraging More People of Color To Enter the Field of Education for your leadership in addressing this critical need.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.