



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**

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**Testimony Re: Article 5, Question 5 Related to School Construction  
House Finance Committee**

**March 31, 2016**

**Stephanie Geller, Senior Policy Analyst**

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 support for Article 5, Question 5 which would put approval of a general obligation bond of \$40 million to fund school construction before Rhode Island voters.

The Public Schoolhouse Assessment, conducted by the Rhode Island Department of Education during the 2011-2012 school year, as well as recent media about poor conditions at schools across the state, highlight the need to address the conditions of our state's schools. More than half (51%) of our schools are between 50 and 100 years old, and the average age of our schools is 58 years old. Facility conditions are problematic with 14 schools determined to be in poor condition (i.e., requiring major renovations or replacement) and an additional 39 schools in fair to poor condition (i.e., needing moderate to major renovations).

School-age children spend more of their time in schools than anywhere else, except their homes, so it is important that schools be safe, clean, and well-equipped and support our children's learning and development. A growing body of research has linked student achievement and behavior to school building conditions and overcrowding. Decaying conditions, such as peeling paint, crumbling plaster, non-functioning toilets, poor lighting, inadequate ventilation, and inoperative heating and cooling systems can affect the learning as well as the health and morale of both staff and students.

Last year's budget created a School Building Authority Capital Fund with appropriate oversight and accountability provisions to ensure that funding goes to the schools with the greatest need and made investments to this fund to help address this situation. However, too many of our students are still attending crumbling schools and continued investments are needed to continue to address this troubling issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your unwavering support of our state's schools.