



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**

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**Testimony Re: H-7657 An Act Relating to Education – Health and Safety of Pupils  
House Committee on Health, Education, and Welfare**

**March 9, 2016**

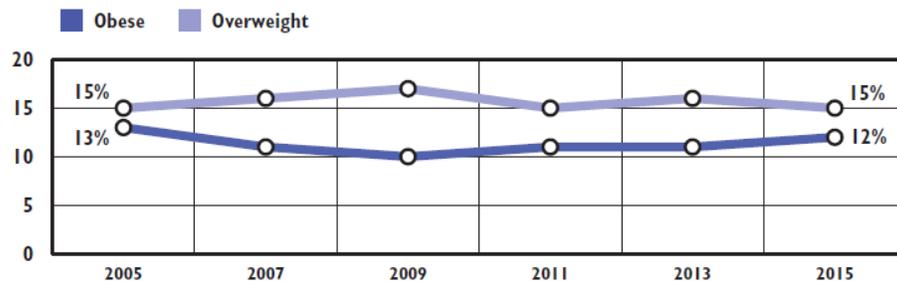
**Jim Beasley, Policy Analyst**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT offers its strong support for House Bill 7657, which modifies the types of healthy foods and beverages sold to students per federal law with exceptions for career and technical schools with culinary arts/food service programs.

**Obesity Among Rhode Island High School Students**

In Rhode Island in 2015, 12% of high school students reported being obese and 15% reported being overweight. Hispanic students (19%), males (16%), and Black, non-Hispanic students (15%) were more likely to report being obese compared to their White, non-Hispanic (10%) and female (8%) high school peers. Rhode Island’s overall high school obesity and overweight prevalence has not significantly improved or worsened since 2005.<sup>1</sup>

**Obesity and Overweight  
Among Rhode Island High School Students, 2005-2015**



Source: *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, Rhode Island, 2005-2015. BMI calculated using self-reported student response.

**Strong Nutrition Standards Have Been Effective in Rhode Island**

As a result of 2006 legislation enacted by the Rhode Island General Assembly, nutritional standards for food and beverages sold or distributed in schools for all children have been strengthened. As a result of a sustained commitment to these strong nutritional standards, the availability of unhealthy foods and beverages in Rhode Island schools has declined. Since 2006-2008, declines in the availability of soda or fruit drinks that are not 100% juice (down 82%), chocolate candy (down 81%), sport drinks (down 80%), salty snacks not low in fat (down 76%), candy (down 75%), 2% or whole milk (down 59%), and baked goods not low in fat (down 38%) have been reported by Rhode Island middle and high school administrators.<sup>2</sup>

**Benefits of the Legislation**

This important piece of legislation would help further solidify these gains by making technical adjustments to Rhode Island’s competitive foods statute to reflect new national standards as well as Rhode Island’s own strong nutritional standards and definitions. While no single factor is driving the increased prevalence of obesity, improving school nutritional standards for all food and beverages distributed or sold in schools is one strategy that can be taken along with others to help prevent and reduce the burden of child and adolescent obesity in Rhode Island.

**Closing**

The Rhode Island General Assembly has shown strong support for promoting and optimizing children's health and nutrition. This legislation is another important positive step toward achieving those goals by further enhancing and reinforcing healthy nutritional standards for all foods and beverages sold or distributed in Rhode Island schools. We urge to you to support this bill and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

**References**

- 1 *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, Rhode Island, 2005-2015
- 2 Rhode Island Department of Education, *School Health Profiles Report*, 2014.