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Testimony Re: H-7131 Regarding the Rhode Island Board of Education Act

House Health, Education, & Welfare Committee

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today regarding House Bill 7131. There are some aspects of this bill that we support and some that we have concerns about.

Literacy Assessments

We know how much third-grade reading matters and that third-grade reading is an essential indicator related to students' success and high school graduation rate. Many of you on this committee have been leaders in efforts to increase reading proficiency and we know you share our interest in supporting grade-level reading.

This bill proposes to eliminate state assessments of literacy in kindergarten through grade three. We have several concerns about this proposal. First, the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, which replaced the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act*, retains the requirement that all states test all students in reading and math in grades three through eight and at least once in high school. This requirement would mean that we must continue to have a reading/literacy assessment in third grade.

Second, this prohibition would be a barrier to our state's goal of increasing the percentage of children, especially low-income children, who are reading proficiently by the end of third grade, an important predictor of whether a child is on-track to graduate from high school. This goal is the heart of Rhode Island's Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and is also included in the Rhode Island Children's Cabinet Strategic Plan for 2015-2020, and the Early Learning Council's Comprehensive Plan for 2016-2020. We need to ensure that our state has the data we need to measure progress on this key indicator.

We are also concerned that this proposal may be perceived as interfering with districts' need to regularly assess children's language and literacy development during the critical early elementary years and put appropriate interventions and supports in place (i.e., through their Personal Literacy Plans) as necessary to ensure that children are reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

Finally, this prohibition could be barrier to the implementation of the Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEA), a comprehensive assessment of children's skills and knowledge at kindergarten entry across multiple domains of

learning, including language, creativity, logic and reasoning, physical, and social-emotional. The KEA is a critical tool for measuring school readiness and for ensuring that kindergarten teachers have the information they need to intervene and assist children as needed.

Testing in High School Grades

This bill proposes to eliminate the high school *PARCC* assessments and to replace these with a “curriculum-based achievement college exam,” such as the SAT. This proposal could have many positive consequences. Having all high school students take the SAT could get more students thinking about, and applying to, college. In 2015, at some Rhode Island high schools, barely more than one-third of students took the SAT, while at others almost all did. Because the SAT also serves as a college entry exam, the test would also likely be taken more seriously than other state assessments by students who want to do their very best on a test that might influence their college acceptance. However, there are still some unanswered questions that will require continued examination. While the new version of the SAT that students are taking for the first time this week was designed to be aligned to the Common Core State Standards, it is still a fairly new test and no independent research studies have been conducted yet to analyze how well this new version reflects the depth and breadth of the Common Core State Standards (and therefore how well-aligned it is to what our children are being taught). So far seven states, including Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming have gotten approval from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) to use either the SAT or ACT as their high school assessment, but the U.S. DOE is asking these states to present evidence that the exams are valid for accountability purposes.

This bill would affect many aspects of our state assessment system. We would urge you to carefully analyze each provision contained in the bill and identify potential positive and negative outcomes each aspect could have on our state’s educational system. I know you agree that we need to have high expectations for our students and our schools. A strong assessment system can help us understand how well we are doing in supporting students so students get the assistance they need to meet these high expectations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for listening to our concerns.