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Testimony Re: H-7221 Regarding the Complete College Rhode Island 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. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Bill 7221. This bill proposes to use performance measures and performance funding as policy levers to increase the number of students who successfully complete college. House Bill 7221 would require that the Board of Education's Council on Post-Secondary Education establish statewide goals for college completion and collect and report data on remediation, students enrolled in adequate numbers of courses to graduate on time, and the average time it takes students to earn a degree or certificate. It would also require that the Council on Post-Secondary Education develop recommendations for performance funding tied to meeting these goals.

Rhode Island is a member of **Complete College America's Alliance of States**, which is working to increase the number of students who successfully complete college and achieve degrees or credentials with value in the labor marketplace and close achievement gaps for traditionally underrepresented groups. **The Alliance has three major goals:**

1. Set statewide and school-specific college completion goals through 2020.
2. Develop action plans and move key policy levers focused on improving college readiness.
3. Collect and report measures of progress in college completion including data on progress by level and type of degree, age, race, and income.

This bill focuses on a number of "key policy levers" that would increase college completion and is consistent with the recommendations in our Issue Brief, *Improving College Access and Completion in Rhode Island*.

A recent publication by Complete College America, titled *The Game Changers*, highlights the kinds of reforms needed to increase college completion. One of these recommended reforms is implementing performance funding for state higher education institutions. According to a July 2015 analysis by the National Conference of State Legislatures, performance funding is already being implemented in 32 states, and we think it is worth exploring here in Rhode Island.

However, it is important that performance funding strategies ensure that Rhode Island works toward increasing college access and completion for **all students** and that it does not serve as a disincentive to serve low-income, minority, first generation, and adult learners who may need additional support to complete college. We know that postsecondary education is increasingly critical in today's job market. By 2020, 71% of all jobs in Rhode Island will require some postsecondary training beyond high school. We also know that adults with more education are more likely to be employed and earn more than adults with lower levels of education. Between 2011 and 2013 in Rhode Island, adults with high school diplomas were almost three times more likely to be unemployed as those with bachelor's degrees or higher. And during that same period, the median annual income for adults with high school diplomas was \$30,298, compared to \$52,184 for adults with bachelor's degrees.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports this bill which we hope will help Rhode Island make progress in increasing the education levels of our residents and improving the economy of our state. We appreciated changes that were made to this bill during the 2015 session to **ensure that data are collected and reported for key student subgroups** (e.g., by race and ELL status) and would encourage the state also to collect and report data for other key groups that may need additional support to succeed in post-secondary education, such as low-income students, first generation college students, and adult learners.

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown on this issue and for the opportunity to testify today.