



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: H-7552 Relating to Affordable Housing – Capital Development Program
House Finance Committee
May 17, 2016
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports House Bill 7552. This bill would provide for a bond referendum which would authorize the issuance of bonds for affordable housing in the amount of \$100 million.

In 2015, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Rhode Island (including utilities) was \$1,238 per month. A worker would have to earn \$23.81 an hour and work 40 hours a week year-round to be able to afford this rent without a cost burden. In 2015, this hourly wage was more than two and a half times the state's minimum wage of \$9.00 per hour.

With jobs that pay family-sustaining wages and affordable housing both in short supply in Rhode Island, many low-income families must choose between paying their rent and meeting their families' other basic needs, so they skimp on food, compromising their children's health and development, and in the worst cases, families are forced into homelessness. Last year, in 2015, 988 children from across the state stayed at emergency homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, and transitional housing programs. These homeless children made up about one-quarter of the people who used homeless shelters in 2015.

Affordable housing and rental vouchers can help low-income families afford the high cost of housing; however, there are not enough affordable housing units or vouchers to meet the need. As a state, Rhode Island lags significantly behind its neighbors in terms of our investment in affordable housing. Investments in Massachusetts are \$99.72 per capita, and in Connecticut they are \$76.98 per capita. In comparison, Rhode Island invests just \$8.46 per capita.

All children need a safe, affordable, stable home in which to eat, sleep, play and grow and increasing the availability of affordable housing across the state will help meet this need.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.