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Testimony Re: S-2525 An Act Relating to Education – Health & Safety of Pupils
Senate Committee on Education
March 23, 2016
Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is opposed to Senate Bill 2525, which prohibits elementary schools and private preschools from holding outdoor recess when the local temperature falls below 32 degrees Fahrenheit.

This law would impact over 60,000 children enrolled in grades K-5 and another 18,000 children enrolled in community-based licensed child care and early learning centers. It is not clear if this law would impact children who are enrolled in licensed family child care homes (up to 3,700 children).

Physical Activity and Recess Have Numerous Documented Benefits

As outlined in our [Promoting Increased Physical Activity in Schools Policy Brief](#) released in January 2016, regular physical activity, including recess, has been shown to have numerous physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and academic benefits for children and youth. Not only does recess provide students with an ongoing opportunity to get part of their recommended daily amount of physical activity, but it also provides them with opportunities to learn valuable communication, problem solving, coordination, and social-emotional skills.

Health and Safety Guidelines for Outdoor Recess

The National Health and Safety Performance standards for Early Care and Education Programs, developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Public Health Association, specify that daily outdoor play provides many health benefits including: providing opportunity for physical activity that supports maintenance of a healthy weight and short exposure of the skin to sunlight promotes the production of vitamin D required for the healthy development of children. The guidelines state that time spent outdoors is a strong, consistent predictor of children's physical activity and that infectious disease organisms are less concentrated in outdoor air than indoor air.

The guidelines state that children should play outside every day unless the weather conditions are extreme. They recommend that infants be taken outside two to three times per day and that toddlers and preschoolers receive 60- 90 minutes per day of outdoor play. The only outdoor weather conditions they identify as potentially hazardous to young children's health are: wind chill conditions that pose a risk of frostbite (**wind chill below minus 15 degrees Fahrenheit**) or heat and humidity conditions that pose a significant risk of heat-related illness (**heat index over 90 degrees**). Wind chill and heat advisories and warnings are identified by the National Weather Service.

Summary

The temperature standard specified in this bill is more restrictive than national experts advise for safe outdoor play. We believe the decision to offer outdoor recess and play time should rest with early childhood program administrators and elementary school principals and that outdoor play time should be offered whenever possible. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.