



Testimony Re: S-2019 Regarding Mayoral Academies
Senate Education Committee
May 3, 2016
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Madam Chairwoman, Mr. Chairman and members of the Joint Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly opposes Senate Bill 2019. This bill would require that mayoral academy applications receive support from applicable city and town councils and school committees through a resolution or ordinance before they can be approved by the Rhode Island Board of Education. Currently, mayoral academies must be created by a mayor acting with a non-profit organization and do not require such approval.

Access to high-quality charter schools, including mayoral academies, provides students and their families with a wider array of educational options to fit their needs and preferences. The public demand for charter schools in Rhode Island is clear based on extensive waiting lists of more than 12,000 students.

Rhode Island currently has two mayoral academies – Blackstone Valley Prep and Achievement First Mayoral Academy. Blackstone Valley Prep, which was established in 2009, currently serves nearly 1,000 students in grades kindergarten through 8th grade. Students come from Central Falls, Cumberland, Lincoln, and Pawtucket. Last year, Blackstone Valley Prep's elementary school was classified as "commended," one of only 9% of schools in the state with this designation. Its middle school was classified as "leading." Achievement First is a newer school and currently serves 180 students in kindergarten and 1st grade from Cranston, North Providence, Providence, and Warwick.

Meanwhile, there is clear evidence that Rhode Island's public education system needs improvement. Many of our students continue to struggle to gain the literacy and numeracy skills they need to gain access to college and careers. For example, only slightly more than half (58%) of Rhode Island's low-income students are reading proficiently in the fourth grade. The state has seen substantial improvements in reading and math achievement and graduation rates over the past 3-5 years, but there is still much work to be done.

Mayoral academies, like other charter schools, are not the solution to improving the quality of education, but they can be part of the solution by providing a high-quality education to children who attend, by demonstrating how practices like longer school days and fostering a strong college-going culture can help students succeed, and by collaborating with school districts to share successful practices.

We ask the members of this Joint Committee to oppose this legislation which would create an unnecessary barrier to mayoral academy establishment and

prevent students and families in Rhode Island, particularly those from families with limited incomes, from having access to a public school option that may help them meet their educational needs. Children from all backgrounds and communities deserve the same opportunity to obtain an excellent education that will prepare them for success in college, their chosen career and in life.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.