



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2495 Regarding Child Opportunity Zones
Senate Education Committee
March 9, 2016
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Madam Chair 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 Senate Bill 2495. This bill defines and clarifies the purpose of Child Opportunity Zones (also known as COZs) asks the Children's Cabinet to incorporate COZs into its strategic plan, assigns the Rhode Island Department of Education the task of administering COZ grants, and requires the Rhode Island Department of Education to provide annual reports on the COZs to this body.

Child Opportunity Zones (COZs) focus on the well-being of the whole child and family, providing integrated education, health, and social services. They provide early childhood education services to promote school readiness and before- and after-school and summer enrichment programs to improve academic and socio-emotional skills, connect families to needed health and social services, and increase student and parent engagement.

Currently, there are ten COZs located in the communities of Bristol Warren, Central Falls, Cranston, Middletown, Newport, North Kingstown, Pawtucket, Providence, Westerly, and Woonsocket. Over the years, I have worked with several COZ sites and found them to be key partners in improving outcomes for children and families, in particular education outcomes. For example, the Cranston COZ has been an active partner in helping to address chronic absenteeism in the Cranston Schools. They have sent information home to parents about the importance of regular attendance and helped address the root causes of absenteeism. In Newport, the COZ delivers a high-quality summer learning program and works with the school district to identify and serve students who most need additional academic support.

COZs across the state are key partners in helping districts achieve important educational objectives, such as increasing third-grade reading proficiency, reducing chronic absence, and improving student and family engagement.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has been a long-time supporter of COZs. We prepared a report on the benefits of COZs back in 1998 and continue to support their work. We believe that a community school/COZ model can help address the barriers that many children from low-income families face and help close the achievement gaps we see between low-income and higher-income students. We encourage you to pass this bill and thank you for the opportunity to testify.