



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: Senate Bill 76- Civics Education
Senate Education Committee
March 3, 2021
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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 76. This bill would require all high school students attending public schools to fulfill at least one-half credit or course requirement and demonstrate proficiency in civics education, beginning with the graduating class of 2022.

Civic education is a graduation requirement in 40 states. Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire all require civic education and students in Vermont are required to pass the U.S. citizenship exam before graduation. Rhode Island is the only state in New England that does not include civic education as part of its graduation expectations.

According to the Rhode Island Secretary of State website 43% of voters from Generation Z (anyone born after 1997) voted during the 2016 Presidential election. However, when disaggregated by city and town, only 31% of Generation Z voters in Pawtucket, 29% of Generation Z voters in Providence, and 26% of Generation Z voters in Central Falls participated in the election.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports efforts that would prioritize districts with a high concentration of poverty and large percentages of immigrant or refugee students to receive support in the implementation of this bill including the provision of curriculum, teacher training, and funds to diversify the educator workforce. We also urge the committee to consider evaluating the implementation of this legislation to ensure students have equitable access to a high-quality civic curriculum before requiring students to demonstrate proficiency.

We urge the committee to consider revisions to this bill that will require the Rhode Island Department of Education, districts, and schools to provide culturally relevant and historically accurate civic education that includes the perspectives and civic actions of historically disenfranchised groups. Schools have a unique opportunity to become leaders in reversing structural racism. Providing culturally relevant and historically accurate civic education is one step that can build the civic knowledge of students so they can become active members in our democracy and exercise their constitutional rights.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

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