



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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**Testimony Re: House Bill 7940 Regarding Executive Office of Commerce
House Housing and Municipal Government Committee**

March 31, 2022

Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director

Mr. Chairman 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 House Bill 7940 and thank Speaker Shekarchi for sponsoring this bill which would make the Deputy Secretary of Commerce for Housing the Secretary of Commerce for Housing, effective July 1, 2022. The Secretary of Commerce for Housing would retain all the powers, duties, responsibilities, and obligations of the Deputy Secretary and would also be a cabinet level position within the executive branch of government.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has been reporting on the cost of housing and the impact of these costs on families' housing stability and on homelessness among Rhode Island children, youth, and families for many years in the *Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*. This past November, we also released a special *Policy Brief* on this important topic, called *Housing Instability and Homelessness Among Rhode Island Children*. This *Policy Brief* contains important data on the housing and homelessness crisis in Rhode Island and key recommendations to support children and families currently experiencing housing instability and homelessness, as well as recommendations for prevention efforts

Poor quality, unaffordable, or crowded housing has a negative impact on children's physical health, development, and emotional well-being and on a family's ability to meet their child's basic needs. When housing costs more than a family can afford, children often live in low-quality and overcrowded housing and move frequently, all of which have been linked to lower educational achievement and increased risk of homelessness. Children who experience homelessness have lower achievement scores and are less likely to graduate from high school. When children live in high-quality housing that is safe, affordable, and located in well-resourced neighborhoods, they do better in school and their parents report better mental health.

Children need safe, affordable housing so they can develop, play, learn, and grow, and adults need it to support their health, safety, and ability to get and keep a job. For all these reasons, we support elevating this position to the cabinet level position, so housing gets the attention it needs and deserves.

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown in addressing the affordable housing needs in our state, and thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.