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**Testimony Re: Senate Bill 458- African Heritage History Education
Senate Education Committee**

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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 458. This bill would require the implementation of education courses in African Heritage and History in elementary and secondary schools in Rhode Island beginning in the 2022-2023 school year.

In October 2019, 45% of Rhode Island public schools students were Students of Color. In the U.S., Students of Color are more likely to report being victims of unfair treatment because of their race compared to White students. According to a national study, Black youth experience an average of more than five racial discrimination experiences every day. Discrimination or expecting future discrimination from teachers is associated with increased stress, decreased engagement in school, and negative academic outcomes. Culturally relevant and historically accurate education that reflects and celebrates the identify of students can have positive impact on school climate, student engagement, and academic outcomes.

In 2019, the Connecticut General Assembly passed legislation that required all school districts to include African American, Black, Puerto Rican and Latino studies as part of the curriculum. Led by the current U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, Connecticut became the first state to utilize its Social Studies Framework themes and inquiry-based approach to provide content rich and personalized learning curriculum that affirms students' racial identity and is designed to improve race relations and inclusivity in Connecticut schools.

Schools have a unique opportunity to become leaders in reversing structural racism. Providing culturally relevant and historically accurate education is one step towards this goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.