



Testimony Re: S-2557 Relating to State Affairs and Government – Open Meetings
Senate Judiciary Committee
May 17, 2022
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Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We would also like to thank Senator Cano for sponsoring this important bill. **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports passage of S-2557**, which would require all Public Bodies to develop a plan to offer translation and interpretation upon request and to implement the plan by September 2023.

Offering simultaneous or consecutive interpretation and translation of key documents under discussion is essential to ensure that families can participate in open meetings and influence decisions made by public bodies. Parents and families are the best advocates to influence policies and budgets that help children thrive.

Interpretation is essential for members of the public to understand the proceedings, for individuals who need interpretation to serve on public bodies, and for the members of the public body to understand statements and questions of constituents.

We recommend the General Assembly also strongly consider changing the law to allow for virtual meetings to allow families and other people who have challenging schedules to participate remotely. Simultaneous interpretation works very well using Zoom technology and hiring a skilled interpreter. We know there are challenges associated with using technology to offer virtual meetings, but the benefits associated with allowing participation by families and individuals who are impacted by policy decisions outweigh the challenges.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT current coordinates and staffs the RI Early Learning Council, a public advisory body that is required under federal law. **We have an appointed member of the Early Learning Council who needs simultaneous interpretation in order to fully participate in the meetings.** We have been offering this interpretation since 2000 over Zoom and have offered it once in person as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important topic. We support all efforts that help families with children participate in meetings that can influence decision that will improve policies and programs for children and youth.