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Testimony Re: Senate Bill 236 -- An Act Relating to Education -- The Education Equity and Property Tax Relief Act

Senate Finance

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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 strong support for Senate Bill 236 and thank Senator Murray for sponsoring this bill and Senators Pearson, Acosta, Euer, Picard, Zurier, DiPalma, Lawson, Lauria, and DiMario for co-sponsoring. This bill would allocate extra funding for districts where 45% or more of the children live at or below 185% of the federal poverty level by increasing the student success factor to 50% of the core instruction per pupil amount for these districts.

In recent years, Rhode Island has taken several steps to ensure that all children have access to the high-quality education they need to succeed in school, career, and life, including fully funding the state share of the funding formula since its inception. However, the local contribution to this formula has yet to keep pace. Disparities in property wealth across the state contribute to the inequality among cities' and towns' ability to raise funds for education. Increasing the local contribution to education funding is a challenge for municipalities with lower levels of property wealth and high percentages of students and families who live in poverty.

In 2020, Rhode Island was one of 17 states determined to have a “regressive” school funding system, providing less to high-poverty districts than to low-poverty communities. The lack of adequate funding has disproportionately impacted Students of Color, 81% of whom are enrolled in the four cores cities (Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket). These cities also have the highest percentage of children living in poverty.

A study published by *Education Next* looked at the persistent achievement gap between low and high-income students. They also found **children in more impoverished households and communities are at greater risk of traumatic stress and other medical problems affecting brain development.**

Increasing the student success factor to 50% for districts with high concentrations of children living in poverty will allow districts to invest in evidence-driven instructional models to support student success in math, science, and reading and prepare them for a competitive workforce.

Thank you for the leadership the General Assembly has shown on this issue and the opportunity to testify today.

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