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## Testimony Re: H5714 – Health Care for Children & Pregnant Women

House Finance Committee

June 9, 2021

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive 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 strong support for House Bill 5716 which would reestablish Rhode Island's commitment to provide health insurance to low-income children who are residents of the state, regardless of immigration status. On behalf of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT I would like to thank Representative David Morales for his leadership in sponsoring the bill. Our support for this legislation reiterates our organization's strong commitment to address the needs of children and families in Rhode Island with a particular focus on closing racial and ethnic disparities.

### History of Health Care Coverage for All Children:

Rhode Island covered all low-income children regardless of immigration status for almost 10 years in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

- In 1996, Rhode Island used state-only funds to provide health insurance coverage for low-income noncitizen children, including undocumented children, who met income guidelines.
- Between 2006 and 2008, the General Assembly repealed coverage for children not eligible for federal funding. By June 2008, over 2,800 legal permanent resident children who had lived in the U.S. for less than five years and undocumented children who were previously enrolled in RIte Care lost coverage. In 2009, federal matching funds for lawfully residing children became available to states as a result of the reauthorization of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).
- As of April 1, 2010, lawfully-residing immigrant children, including LPR children, refugees, asylees (refugees and asylees were always eligible for RIte Care) and several other statuses, became eligible for the RIte Care.

### Importance of health insurance coverage for children:

Children who have health insurance coverage are healthier and have fewer preventable hospitalizations than those who are uninsured. Children who are insured through Medicaid/RIte Care are more likely to receive primary and preventative medical and dental care, have access to specialists, and have fewer unmet health needs than uninsured children. Evidence also shows that Medicaid/RIte Care has reduced racial/ethnic disparities in access and utilization, improved educational outcomes, and shielded children from poverty.

## Closing

In 2019, 98.1% of Rhode Island children had health insurance coverage. Only about 5,000 Rhode Island children are uninsured, and 3,000 of these children are income eligible for RItE Care. To achieve our goal of covering all kids, we must restore access to RItE Care health insurance for income-eligible children who are undocumented immigrants. All children need access to health care that supports their healthy growth and development and promotes school success. It is far more cost effective to provide access to primary, preventive care to undocumented children through the Cover All Children bill than paying the far higher cost when a health condition that could have been prevented or treated early escalates to an emergency requiring emergency room care that the state pays for. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT thanks the General Assembly for their dedication to improving child health in the state of Rhode Island and urges you to pass this bill.