



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**  
ONE UNION STATION  
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903  
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

**Testimony Re: House Bill 7539- Curriculum**  
**House Education Committee**  
**April 11, 2022**  
**Paige Clausius-Parks, Senior Policy Analyst**

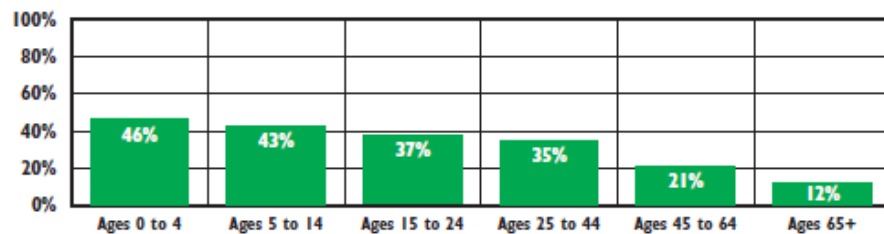
Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its **strong opposition** to House Bill 7539. This bill would place restrictions on both curriculum and teaching practices in Rhode Island by prohibiting terms like “supremacy”, instructional materials that depict identity groups as oppressors and/or victims, center any race, ethnicity, gender, religion or viewpoint, prohibit psychological or medical counseling in any school setting, exclude gender identity and sexual orientation in sex education, require educators to use names and pronouns associated with a student’s biological gender instead of their gender identity, and establishes disciplinary measures against educators for violation of these provisions.

**Historically Accurate Curricula**

Young children in Rhode Island are more likely to be identified as People of Color than any other age group. In 2019 in Rhode Island, 46% of children under age five and 43% of children ages 5 to 14 were People of Color. **Rhode Island’s future is diverse, and this diversity is an incredible asset.**



**Percentage of Population Identified as People of Color by Age, Rhode Island, 2019**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, 2019.

Last year, the General Assembly passed legislation that requires schools to provide education courses in African American history in elementary and secondary schools. We thank Representative Williams for sponsoring and the General Assembly for passing this important legislation and also thank Representative Fenton-Fung for sponsoring House Bill 7272 this year which would require all public elementary and secondary schools in Rhode Island to provide at least one unit of instruction on Asian American history and culture. **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.**

House Bill 7539 would prohibit the use of terms like “supremacy”, texts that show groups as oppressors, and instructional materials that center any race, ethnicity, gender, religion or viewpoint. If passed, this bill would prohibit educators from teaching historically accurate elements of African American history like slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, the terror of the Ku Klux Klan, and the accomplishments of leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. This prohibition would also impact educators’ ability to teach about women’s suffrage, Asian American, Native American, Latino American, Jewish American histories, and the histories of immigrants from across the world. Ultimately, **this type of prohibition limits students’ exposure to and appreciation of the accomplishments of historically marginalized peoples of the United States.**

### **Protecting the Safety of Transgender Students**

Rhode Island has been a national leader in passing laws protecting the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) youth and adults including anti-discrimination laws for gender identity including for employment, anti-bullying laws, gender-neutral bathrooms, fair housing, and the Uniform Parentage Act. According to the Transgender Law Center’s National Equality Map, Rhode Island is one of the top 14 states in the country for our policies that help drive equality for LGBTQ people. **House Bill 7539 would take Rhode Island backwards by requiring educators to go against best practices of working with transgender students** and prohibit educators from referring to a transgender student by their preferred name and to not use pronouns associated with a student’s gender identity without parental or guardian permission.

Requiring educators to get parental or guardian permission **jeopardizes the safety of transgender youth and children.** Youth who identify as LGBTQ are overrepresented in the homeless youth population, some of whom report being forced out of their homes by parents who disapprove of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Students who are LGBTQ are at higher risk of depression and suicidality than their peers, but the National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that support and acceptance, including having most people in their lives respect their preferred pronouns reduces this risk.

### **School-Based Mental Health**

House Bill 7539 prohibits psychological and medical counseling in any school setting. Feelings of safety and connection with school are the most important school climate factors for promoting and protecting student mental and emotional well-being. School-based mental health professionals have an important role to play in creating and sustaining positive school climates and can improve health outcomes, school safety, attendance rates, graduation rates, academic achievement and career preparation, and lower rates of suspension and other disciplinary incidents. **We strongly support efforts to ensure students have access to mental health supports in schools and increase the hiring of new school-based mental health professionals.**

We would like to thank the General Assembly for your commitment to safe and inclusive schools for all students, because **all kids count**, including our transgender youth and our Students of Color. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.