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Testimony Re: House Bill 7736 Re: Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Disability Impact Statement Act

House State Government and Elections Committee

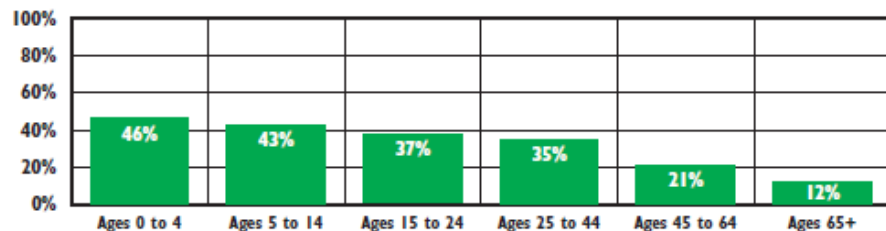
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its **strong support** for H7736 and thank Representative Cassar for introducing this important legislation and Representatives Morales, Kazarian, Alzate, Lombardi, Kislak, Barros, Knight, Williams and Amore for co-sponsoring. This bill would require the General Assembly to include combined race, ethnicity, gender and disability impact statements in any legislation that pertains to human services, medical, dental or behavioral health care, disability services, housing or housing assistance; education; employment and labor; land use and transportation; criminal justice; and legislation that will have economic or environmental impacts on communities.

For 27 years Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has published the *Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* which provides a statistical portrait of Rhode Island's children and our [Racial and Ethnic Disparities](#) indicator tracks the gap that exists in economic, health, safety, and education outcomes for children of different racial and ethnic groups in Rhode Island. Year after year data has shown large and unacceptable disparities by race, ethnicity, and disability. **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports efforts to develop policies that reduce and eliminate disparities, prevent the exacerbation of existing disparities, and allow policymakers to make data informed decisions.**


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



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

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 were People of Color, compared with 35% of adults ages 25 to 44 and 12% of people ages 65 or over. Rhode Island's future is diverse and this diversity is an incredible asset. **Creating racially aware policies, especially those that impact children, is imperative for a prosperous future for all of Rhode Island.**

Race impact statements are tools to assist lawmakers in analyzing and modifying proposed legislation to avoid unintentional worsening of existing disparities. It is more difficult to change legislation once it is adopted and impact statements that consider race, ethnicity, gender and disability early in the legislative process can help improve efficiencies and outcomes for all Rhode Islanders.

The idea of assessing the racial effect of proposed legislation is not new. Iowa began using racial impact statements for criminal justice bills in 2008, and nine states have applied them to criminal justice-related measures in the years since. The National Juvenile Justice Network, the country's leading organization dedicated to state-based juvenile justice reform, studied the implementation of race impact statements and recommends including race, ethnicity, disability, gender, and sexual orientation in impact statements to strengthen the efficacy, as this proposed bill does. Recently, states have begun looking at how racial impact statements could be attached to bills dealing with a broader range of topics, including health and education and not just criminal justice. Maine's law passed last year calls for a study to determine which policy areas might benefit from the use of such statements, "including, but not limited to, education; health care; employment, including wages; housing, including home ownership; and criminal justice and public safety."

To be most effective, race, ethnicity, gender and disability impact statements should provide a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the impact of the proposed legislation using a standardized process and methodology and should be made publicly available to all stakeholders including constituents and advocates as early in the legislative process as possible, preferably before the bill is scheduled for a hearing. Legislation should prohibit the passage of bills that will increase disparities by race, ethnicity, gender or disability.

The mission of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is to improve the health, safety, education, economic well-being, and development of Rhode Island's children with a commitment to equity and the elimination of unacceptable disparities by race, ethnicity, disability, zip code, immigration status, neighborhood, and income. This bill could help decrease disparities by race, ethnicity, gender and disability by creating racially and culturally aware policies that address structural and institutional racism, sexism and ableism and identify discriminatory policies before they are adopted. We urge the committee to consider passage.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.