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Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2290 Re: Rhode Island Hope Scholarship
Senate Finance Committee
March 24, 2022
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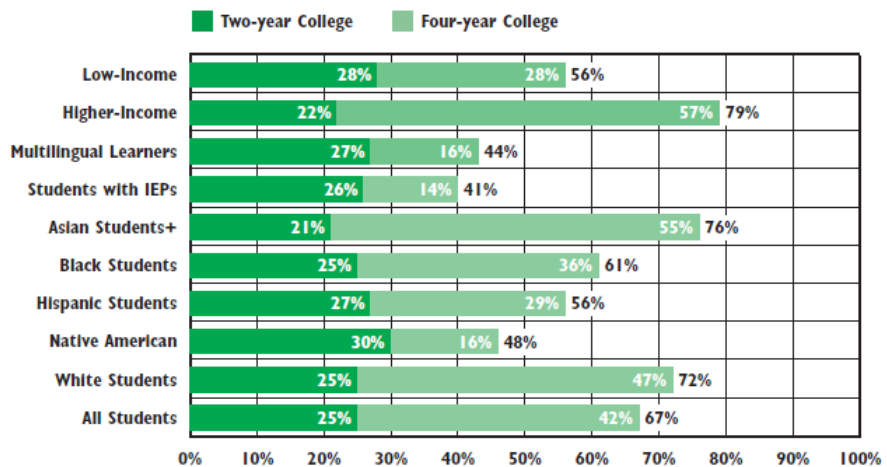
Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for Senate Bill 2290. This bill would establish the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship which would provide qualified graduating high school students two years of free tuition and fees at Rhode Island College. We want to thank Chair Pearson for his leadership and also thank Chairwoman Cano, Senators Gallo, Goodwin, Murray, Valverde, and DiMario for co-sponsoring.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is the lead convener of the **Rhode Island Alliance for College and Career Readiness**. The Alliance was established in 2017 to raise awareness about the connection between college and career readiness, the success of individual students, and the economic prosperity of our state. The Alliance identifies and advocates for legislative and regulatory changes and budgetary investments needed to increase college and career readiness and access and to address racial, ethnic, and income disparities.

We support this proposal because increasing the percentage of Rhode Islanders with a college degree is vital to the future of our young people and our state’s economy. Between 2019 and 2029, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education, yet only 36% of Rhode Island adults ages 25 to 64 have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Many students, especially low-income students, face barriers to college enrollment and success, such as insufficient academic preparation, difficulty navigating the application and financial aid processes, and the high cost of college.

Immediate College Enrollment by Family Income, Race, Ethnicity, and Type of College, Class of 2019, Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2019. Percentages may not sum exactly due to rounding.
 +Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

Sixty-seven percent of Rhode Island students who graduated from high school in the Class of 2019 immediately enrolled in college. However, there are large gaps in college access, particularly four-year college enrollment, between low- and higher-income students as well as by race and ethnicity, language status, and disability. Compared to the class of 2016, before the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship was available, the two-year college enrollment rate has increased from 16% to 25%. However, during this same time, the four-year college enrollment rate has decreased from 43% to 42% and the four-year college enrollment rate for low-income students has remained the same (28%). **Rhode Island students, especially our low-income students, need a four-year college option.**

The Rhode Island Hope Scholarship is likely to increase the percentage of low-income students and Students of Color enrolling at Rhode Island College and make a four-year college experience accessible. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT urges the committee to consider a revision to this bill that would allow students with disabilities to participate in the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship program with reasonable accommodations, including part-time study, and to consider an income limit as a means of targeting resources to students in greatest financial need.

Affordability is not the only barrier to increasing Rhode Island's college enrollment and completion rates, but it is an important one. Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown in investing in children from birth through college and investing in the education and training of our state's workforce and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.