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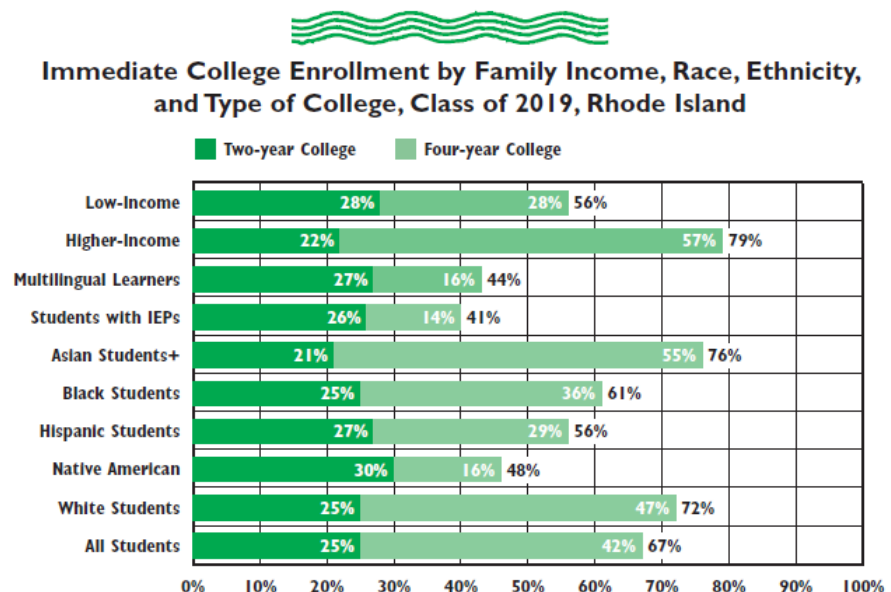
**Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2591 Re: Rhode Island Promise Scholarship**  
**Senate Finance Committee**  
**March 24, 2022**  
**Paige Clausius-Parks, Senior Policy Analyst**

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 support for Senate Bill 2591 and thank Senator Lawson for sponsoring this bill and Chair Cano, Senators Goodwin, McCaffrey, Ruggerio, DiMario, Euer, Murray, Sosnowski, and Gallo for co-sponsoring. This bill would expand the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship to Rhode Island College and would allow students to apply one scholarship to an associate degree at the Community College of Rhode Island and then enroll in Rhode Island College to complete a degree in a qualifying program of study.

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.



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 expansion of the Rhode Island Promise 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.

In addition, Rhode Island must create opportunities for Students of Color to enroll and succeed in teacher preparation programs and limit unnecessary barriers to the profession. This bill would help to decrease the financial barriers for Students of Color to pursue a career in elementary education, special education, and early childhood education, youth development and social work, all programs offered at Rhode Island College.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT urges the committee to consider a revision to this bill that would exclude any grants received by students from the Department of Children, Youth and Families Higher Education Opportunity Incentive Grant, or the College Crusade Scholarship in the calculation of federal or financial aid.

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.