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**Testimony Re: Article 1, Section 15 Regarding RI Promise House Finance Committee**

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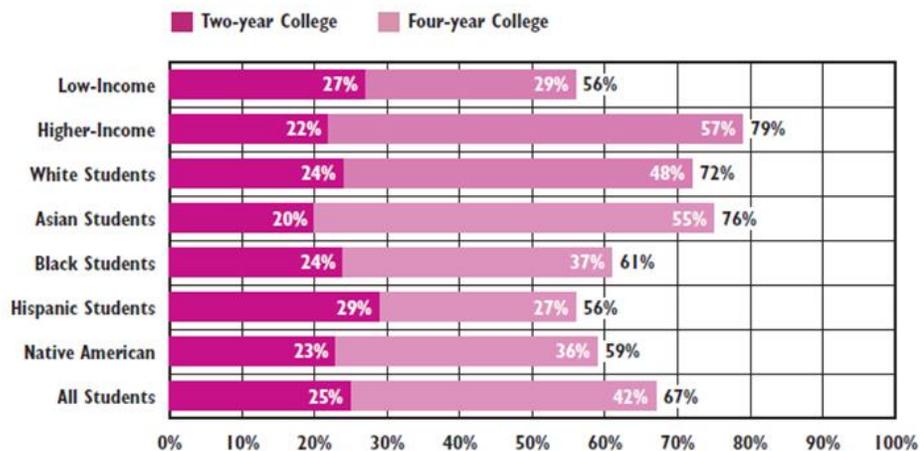
Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for Article 1, Section 15.** This Article would make the Rhode Island Promise scholarship program permanent by removing the provision that the program end with the high school graduating class of 2021. The current scholarship provides qualified graduating high school students two years of free tuition and fees at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI). The projected cost of continuing this successful scholarship program would be \$7.7 million in FY 2022.

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.

Between 2018 and 2028, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education. Between 2014 and 2018 in Rhode Island, adults with high school diplomas were almost three times more likely to be unemployed as those with bachelor's degrees or higher. Making the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship Program permanent would allow our state to continue to make progress in increasing college access, enrollment, and completion by ensuring that our young people have the financial resources they need to enroll in and complete a postsecondary degree or certificate.



**Immediate College Enrollment by Family Income, Race, Ethnicity, and Type of College, Class of 2018, Rhode Island**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2018. Percentages may not sum exactly due to rounding.

**The current Rhode Island Promise Scholarship has been a success.** The overall college enrollment rate has increased from 59% for the class of 2016 (before the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship was available) to 67% for the class of 2018. During the same period, the two-year college enrollment rate has increased from 16% to 25%.

The message is getting through that all students can afford to attend college. While many low-income students can attend CCRI for free by accessing a federal Pell Scholarship, the Rhode Island Promise's clear and easy-to-understand messaging has increased the number of students from all income levels who see college as a path they can pursue and know they have financial support to do so.

The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to impact economic mobility and have devastating long-lasting effects on children in poverty. Black and Hispanic households are projected to face the greatest increase in poverty, and racial and ethnic disparities may be exacerbated. It is critical to continue efforts to increase college enrollment and completion among these groups so we do not lose equity gains.

Increasing the education levels of Rhode Islanders will require that we make improvements at all points in the early education to college system, including increasing access to high-quality Pre-K, improving K-12 education, implementing research-driven dropout prevention programs, simplifying the college admissions process, making college affordable, and providing student support programs that increase college completion rates.

**Affordability is not the only barrier to increasing Rhode Island's college enrollment and completion rates, but it is an important one.** Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports Article 1, Section 15 which would sustain the successful aspects of the current Rhode Island Promise Scholarship and help Rhode Island continue to make progress in increasing postsecondary attainment rates and increase the economic prosperity of the state. We also support the Governor's proposal to use Governor's Emergency Education Relief Funds to expand the RI Promise Scholarship to include working parents, students who have amassed college credits, and students who were unable to enroll at CCRI immediately after high school due to COVID-19. And we are always available to share ideas about how to make the RI Promise Program the best program it can be so we can help more students achieve their dream of college and at the same time improve the economic prosperity of our state.

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.