

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 House Bill 5224 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 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.