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Testimony Re: House Bill 5699 Re: Increasing Opportunities for Teachers of Color Act
House Finance Committee
March 23, 2021
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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 House Bill 5699** which would provide \$2 million for a scholarship fund to prepare students of color to enter the field of education.

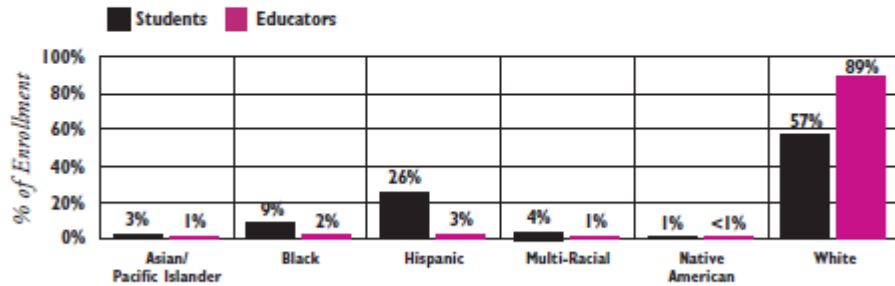
Closing unacceptable, wide, and persistent gaps for students of color, low-income students, students with disabilities and Multilingual Learners must be Rhode Island’s most urgent educational priority. Supporting the recruitment and retention of a diverse pool of educators is an important step in addressing these gaps.

Rhode Island’s student population is increasingly diverse, yet only a small fraction of Rhode Island teachers are teachers of color.



Rhode Island Educator Demographics

Rhode Island Public School Student Enrollment and Teacher Demographics by Race and Ethnicity, 2018-2019 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, State Report Card, 2018-2019 school year.

In October 2018, 89% (12,367) of Rhode Island public school educators identified as White, 3% (454) as Hispanic, 2% (249) as Black, 1% (120) as Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% (85) as Multi-Racial, and less than 1% (25) as Native American. Educators of color benefit all students, especially students of color. Students of color demonstrate long-term academic achievement including higher reading and math test scores, decreased likelihood of dropping out of high school, increased likelihood of going to college, and increased social and emotional development in classes with teachers of color.

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According to a recent report by the Center for the Study of Educators at Annenberg Institute at Brown University, teachers tend to work close to where they grew up or completed their teacher preparation. Nearly half of early-career external applicants for teaching positions in Providence Public Schools come from a Rhode Island teacher education program, mostly Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island.

Rhode Island must create opportunities for educators 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 education.

In recent years, Rhode Island has taken a number of steps to ensure that all children have access to the kind of high-quality education they need to succeed in school, career, and life. These key steps included instituting an education funding formula that is based on five key principles – equity, adequacy, predictability, accountability, and efficiency and later improving this funding formula to provide additional funds to support the additional needs of Multilingual/English Learners, although more support is needed in this area. Another key step was developing a Basic Education Plan (BEP) that outlines the rights of every student in the Rhode Island public education system and sets basic standards to help ensure that high-quality education is available to all public school students, regardless of where they live or go to school.

Even after these important steps, we know that there are still inequities. Rhode Island needs to encourage more people of color to pursue careers in education and support them to ensure that they stay in the field of education. Encouraging more people of color to enter education can increase cultural competencies, reduce significant disparities in suspension rates, and decrease barriers between parents, communities, and schools.

We thank Representative Williams, Representative Alzate, and members of the Legislative Commission to Study and Provide Recommendations for Encouraging More People of Color to Enter the Field of Education for your leadership in addressing this critical need.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.