



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

**Testimony Re: Senate Bill 13- Charter Schools Moratorium
Senate Education Committee**

January 27, 2021

Paige Clausius-Parks, Senior Policy Analyst

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its opposition to Senate Bill 13 which would place a moratorium on the creation or expansion of charter schools through the 2023-2024 school year. This bill would reverse the approvals for new and expanded charter school seats approved by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education last month.**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports both high-quality district schools and high-quality public charter schools.

High-quality education can help to lift children out of poverty and to ensure that we have the kind of well-educated citizenry and workforce that Rhode Island needs to prosper. Yet, only 32% of low-income students, 33% of Black and Hispanic students, 20% of Multilingual Learners, and 14% of students with disabilities are reading proficiently by the end of third grade and on the path to high school graduation.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is deeply committed to the students, families, and educators across the state and to the improvement of district public schools as evidenced by our advocacy and involvement in the Community Design Team and contributions to the Providence Turnaround Plan. However, we know that changing a system takes time. This is time that students and families should not have to wait for. There is an urgent need to close wide and unacceptable disparities in education opportunities and outcomes based on race, income, language status, and disability.

We support having a strong, diverse array of public charter schools so that families that are often underserved in traditional public schools have more choices to meet the needs of their children. Access to high-quality public charter schools provides students and their families with a wider array of educational options that fit their needs and allows them to obtain an excellent education that will prepare them for success in college, their chosen career, and life.

We know that many have concerns about how charter schools are funded, particularly how they receive funding from the state's funding formula and how local aid is disbursed to charter schools. We agree that this is a critical issue that needs discussion and action; however, **we do not agree that students and families that desperately seek**

school options should be denied opportunities to a high-quality public charter school while the General Assembly and Council of Elementary and Secondary Education work to improve the funding formula and investment strategy.

There is significant unmet demand by families for public charter school opportunities, as evidenced by the record number of 20,000 charter school applications for this school year. In Providence, nearly 5,000 families applied for a public charter school placement, yet only 18% (900) received one. If passed, this bill would limit access and opportunities for families to enroll in high-quality public charter schools that fit the needs of their child. The opportunity to have educational options that meet the needs of students is a privilege that many higher-income families exercise regularly. **The pursuit of a high-quality education should not be a privilege, and low-income students and students of color should not have to wait for public charter school options while the systems that are failing them strive to improve.**

It is critical that there be both high-quality district schools and high-quality public charter schools. We urge you to oppose this bill so that a range of options is available to students who need them.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.