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**Testimony Re: House Bill 7007 Regarding Professional Development
Relating to Reading Disabilities**

House Health, Education & Welfare 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 support for the intent of House Bill 7007 which would require the Rhode Island Department of Education to offer professional development opportunities related to reading disabilities, including dyslexia. The state should allocate resources to ensure this happens.

As of June 2016, 5% of all Rhode Island public school students ages 6 through 21 were identified as having a learning disability. In fact, almost 40% of all Rhode Island students with an IEP have learning disabilities as their primary disability.

Learning disabilities are neurologically-based processing problems. These processing problems can interfere with learning basic skills such as reading, writing, and math, or acquiring other skills such as organization, time management, abstract reasoning, and attention. Learning disabilities can affect a student's performance in school, success in the workplace, and relationships with family and friends.

In the U.S., approximately 80% of children who have an IEP for a learning disability have their primary difficulties in learning how to read. Students with reading disabilities often require intensive instruction individualized to meet their needs in order to make progress and reach proficiency levels. There are several evidence-based instructional techniques that can help children with reading disabilities acquire proficiency in reading.

As you may know, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the United Way of Rhode Island are coordinating Rhode Island Reads, a statewide campaign to raise awareness about the importance of third grade reading proficiency. Governor Raimondo has joined the Campaign and established a statewide goal of doubling the number of third graders who are reading on grade level by 2025. Currently, only 40% of third graders in Rhode Island are meeting expectations for reading.

Reading proficiency in third grade is a key predictor of school success and high school graduation. Research shows that children who are not proficient readers by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.

This proposed legislation will focus attention on supporting reading instruction, including identifying and supporting children who have reading disabilities with a focus on reaching teachers of children in kindergarten through third grade. Instead of requiring two hours annually of professional development on this topic, we would suggest that staff professional development plans be customized for each teacher and school so that staff and include a meaningful dosage of evidence-based professional development in reading disabilities, including dyslexia, to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to identify and teach children with reading disabilities.

Thank you for considering this bill and for the opportunity to testify today.