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**Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2348 International Dyslexia Association
Certification Partial Fee Waiver**

**Senate Education Committee
February 28, 2018
Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for the intent of Senate Bill 2348 which would require the Rhode Island Department of Education to coordinate a one-half fee waiver for elementary grade teachers in public school districts to obtain a graduate certificate in dyslexia knowledge and practices through the University of Rhode Island. The certificate is aligned with the International Dyslexia Association Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading. The state should allocate resources to ensure adequate professional development in reading instruction (including identifying and teaching children with dyslexia and reading disabilities) is available and affordable to teachers and provide incentives for teachers to build skills in this area.

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. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports efforts to ensure that school teachers in the state have access to evidence-based professional development in reading instruction, including identifying and teaching children with dyslexia and reading disabilities.

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