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Testimony Re: Article 11 Regarding the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship

House Finance Committee

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Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director

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 strong support for Article 11 of the budget. This Article would make the current Rhode Island Promise permanent. The current scholarship provides qualified graduating high school students two years of free tuition and fees at Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI). The projected cost of continuing this successful scholarship program would be \$7.9 million in FY 2020. Article 11 would also expand the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship in two important ways:

- (1) **Rhode Island College (RIC):** Expands the RI Promise Scholarship to RIC students in their third and fourth years who have earned a minimum of 60 credit hours and declared a major. Students who have previously received a scholarship to the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) would not be eligible. The projected cost of this expansion would be \$3.3 million, including \$2.4 million for scholarship awards and \$900,000 to support services at RIC.
- (2) **Adult Students:** Expands the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship to adult students ages 25 and older pursuing degrees and certificates from CCRI beginning in the fall of 2019. Students would be required to complete at least 18 credit hours per year, maintain a 2.5 grade point average, and remain on-track to completing the degree or credential being pursued. The scholarship would fund 60 credit hours over a maximum of four years. The projected cost of this expansion would be \$2.0 million.

We strongly support this proposal because increasing the percentage of Rhode Islanders with a college degree is vital to the future of our young people and our state's economy.

By 2020 (next year), 71% of jobs in Rhode Island will require post-secondary education beyond high school, and yet only 47% of Rhode Island adults between the ages of 25 and 64 have an associate degree, bachelor's degree, or industry-recognized credential.

Rhode Island Promise Scholarship at CCRI

The current Rhode Island Promise Scholarship has been a success. There has been a two-fold (113%) increase in the number of students enrolling at CCRI full-time immediately after high school graduation, and many of these new students are low-income students (143% increase) and students of color (164% increase). 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.

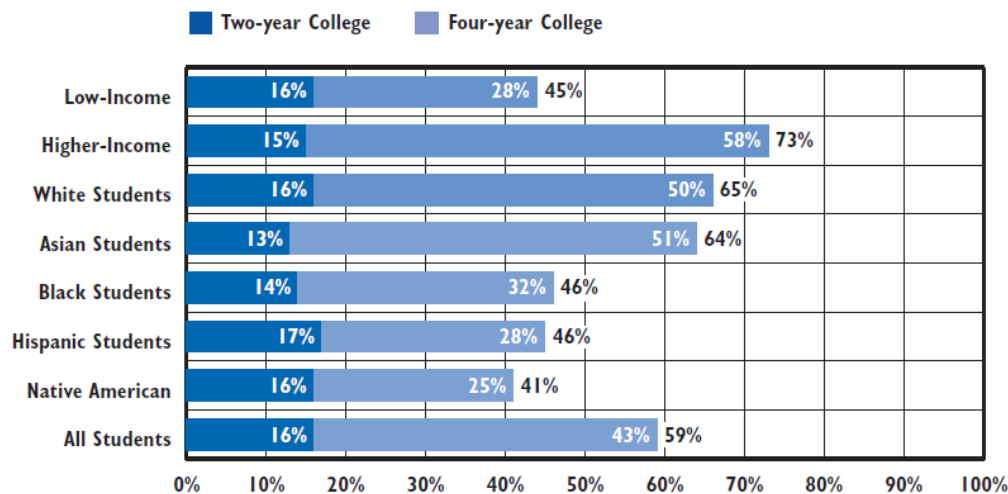
We urge you to make the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship permanent.

Expansion to Rhode Island College

Only slightly more than half (59%) of Rhode Island students who graduated from high school in the Class of 2016 immediately enrolled in college, and there were large gaps in college enrollment, particularly four-year college enrollment, between low- and higher-income students and between White students and students of color.

Among Rhode Island students who graduated from high school in 2016, 45% of low-income students immediately enrolled in college, compared to 73% of higher-income students. And while 58% of higher-income students enrolled in a four-year college, only 28% of low-income students enrolled in a four-year college. The expansion of the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship to provide tuition/fees for the third and fourth years at RIC is likely to increase the percentage of low-income students and students of color enrolling at Rhode Island College and we hope that further expansion of the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship in future years will increase enrollment at the University of Rhode Island among low-income students and students as color as well.

Immediate College Enrollment by Family Income, Race, Ethnicity, and Type of College, Class of 2016, Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2016. Percentages may not sum exactly due to rounding.

We urge you to expand the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship to Rhode Island College to make a four-year college experience accessible to more low-income students and students of color.

Expansion to Adult Students

As a children’s policy and advocacy organization, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT also supports the expansion of the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship to adult students. We know that parental educational attainment has an impact on many aspects of child well-being, including children’s

health and health-related behaviors, children's access to sufficient educational resources, and the level of education they will ultimately achieve.

Between 2012 and 2016 in Rhode Island, adults with high school diplomas were almost three times more likely to be unemployed as those with bachelor's degrees or higher. During that same period, the median annual income for adults with high school diplomas was \$31,658, compared to \$52,030 for adults with bachelor's degrees.

Providing greater access to community college for adults, many of whom are parents, to work toward a degree or certificate that will help them obtain and keep a better job is better for these adults, their children, and our state's economy. For this reason, we urge you to make the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship available to adults ages 25 and older.

Increasing the education levels of Rhode Islanders will require that we make improvements at all points in the early education to college systems, including increasing access to high-quality preschool, 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. Article 11 would sustain the successful aspects of the current Rhode Island Promise Scholarship and improve it to increase affordability and equity and encourage immediate and full-time college enrollment, strategies shown to improve college completion rates.

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.