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**Testimony Re: House Bill 5862 Regarding RI Promise**

**House Finance Committee**

**April 30, 2019**

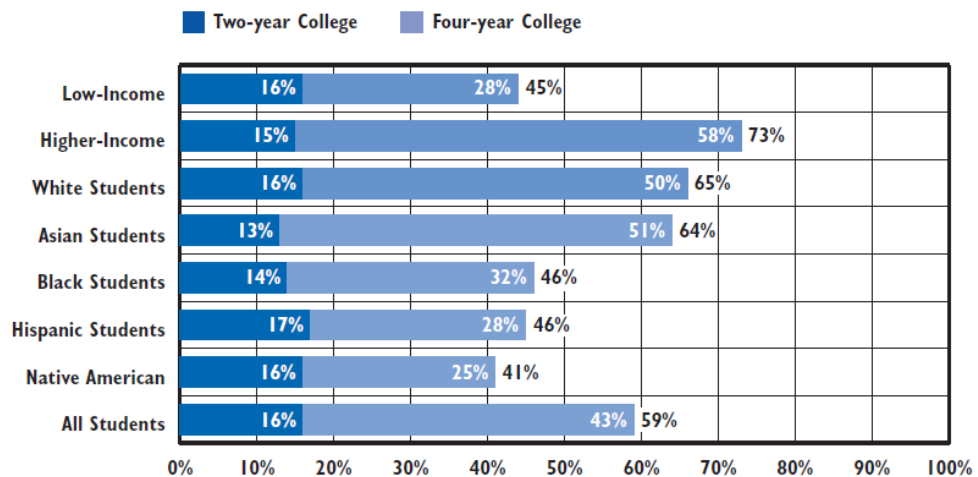
**Paige Clausius-Parks, Senior Policy Analyst**

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 House Bill 5862. This bill would extend the current Rhode Island Promise for two years through 2022. The current scholarship provides qualified graduating high school students two years of free tuition and fees at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI). The projected cost of continuing this successful scholarship program would be \$7.9 million in FY 2020.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is the lead convener of the **Rhode Island Alliance for College and Career Readiness**. The Alliance was established in 2017 to raise awareness about the connection between college and career readiness, the success of individual students, and the economic prosperity of our state. The Rhode Island Promise Scholarship Program allows us to make progress as a state and ensure that our young people have the financial resources they need to enroll in and complete a postsecondary degree.

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).

**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.

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.

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. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports House Bill 5862 which would sustain the successful aspects of the current Rhode Island Promise Scholarship for two more years and strongly supports the expansion of the program as proposed in Article 11 to Rhode Island College and adult students.

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.