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Testimony Re: Senate Bill 190 Relating to the Education Equity and Property Tax Relief Act

Senate Finance Committee

May 27, 2025

Stephanie Geller, Deputy 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 support for Senate Bill 190, which would amend the state's education funding formula and provide additional aid to districts with the highest concentrations of low-income students. We would like to thank Senator Murray for sponsoring this bill and Senators Thompson, Acosta, Bell, Urso, and Zurier for co-sponsoring.

Over the years, Rhode Island has taken several steps to ensure that all children have access to the high-quality education they need to succeed in school, career, and life. **In 2010, the General Assembly enacted the state's first education funding formula, which was based on five key principles – equity, adequacy, predictability, accountability, and efficiency.** We thank the General Assembly and in particular the Finance Committee for all your hard work to establish the funding formula through legislation, to ensure that it is fully funded and to seek improvements to the formula to better meet the needs of Rhode Island students.

Article 7 of the Governor's proposed FY 2026 budget included a proposal to continue these improvements by increasing the student success factor from 40% to 43% to better meet the needs of students in low-income families who live in Rhode Island communities with the highest concentration of poverty (more than 65% of students). This modification would impact five districts in FY 2026 -- Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

In our testimony on this budget article, we indicated our support for this measure but also noted that we would recommend that the student success factor should be even higher, given the additional needs of low-income students and evidence from studies that show such students may require as much as 2-3 times more funding. This bill is in line with our recommendation and increases the student success factor from 40% to 50% for districts with more than 45% of students identified as low income. This bill would likely affect not just the five districts mentioned above (Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket), but other urban ring districts including Cranston, East Providence, Johnston, North Providence, and West Warwick, which also serve many low-income students.

It is time to take a fresh look at the state's education funding formula to ensure that high-need districts receive the aid they need and to ensure that we are adequately funding transportation, special education, and other needs. We also want to express our concern about proposals to allow districts to opt out of important initiatives, like trauma-informed schools, due to lack of funding. Instead, we need to ensure that our schools receive the funding they need to provide students, educators, and schools with the support they need to thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.