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Testimony Re: S-805 Regarding Equity Impact Statement Act

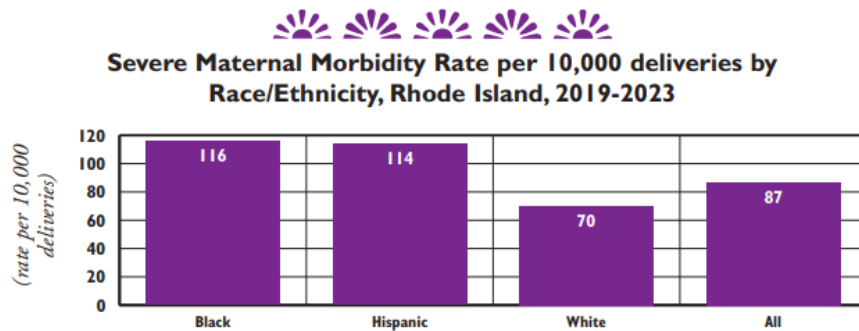
Senate Judiciary Committee

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 strong support for Senate Bill 805. This bill would establish a two-year pilot program that would permit up to 20 Equity Impact Statements per legislative session in 2026 and 2027. The Senate President and House Speaker could each request up to five statements and the RIBLIA Caucus could request a total of 10 statements, five for each chamber. These Equity Impact Statements would address what impact legislation would have on Rhode Island residents based on race, color, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age or country of ancestral origin. The legislation would designate the Commission on Health Advocacy & Equity (CHAE) to lead the drafting of these statements. In addition, this legislation would require that the budget request instructions given to state agencies annually include a request for information on how proposals address equity. Finally, this legislation would require that the Governor’s proposed budget include an equity review.

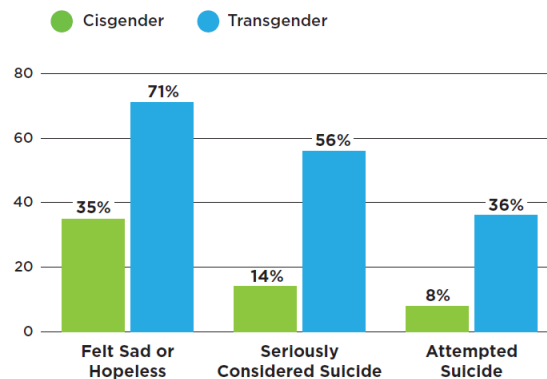
There are persistent, widespread, and unacceptable disparities in the health, safety, education, and economic well-being of children and youth by race, ethnicity, immigration status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identify, disability, and other factors. We present data on many of these disparities in our annual *Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* and other publications to raise awareness about disparities, increase understanding about the root causes of these disparities (including structural racism and discrimination), and identify the policies Rhode Island should put in place to reduce and eliminate these disparities. Here are a few examples of the data we present:



Nationally, Black women are almost three times more likely than white women to die of pregnancy-related complications. In Rhode Island, maternal mortality

numbers are too small to report, so to better measure maternal health during pregnancy and after childbirth, Rhode Island reports the prevalence of maternal morbidity. Severe maternal morbidity is defined as unintended outcomes of labor and delivery that result in significant consequences to a woman's health. We see large disparities in these rates by race and ethnicity. Equity impact statements could help us better understand how legislative and budgetary proposals (e.g., proposals to reduce access to domestic violence services or increase access to doulas or certified professional midwives) could positively or negatively impact these disparities.

**MENTAL HEALTH OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS,
RHODE ISLAND, BY GENDER IDENTITY,
2021 AND 2023**



Source: Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2021 and 2023.

According to the *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, transgender youth are more likely to feel sad and hopeless and seriously consider or attempt suicide. This bill would provide an opportunity for legislators to consider if proposed legislation would result in better or worse support for these youth in their schools and in their communities and better or worse mental health outcomes.

As the bill states, “past legislation in Rhode Island has been implemented without attention to equity.” Some of this legislation has had negative impacts on certain communities and other legislation has been drafted and passed without attention to how it could be improved to reduce or eliminate disparities.

This bill would help this body better understand the impact (positive or negative) that legislative and budgetary proposals would likely have on Rhode Islanders based on their race, color, ethnicity, religion sex, sexual orientation, gender identify or expression, disability, age or country of ancestral origin. Nine states (Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, and Virginia) have implemented mechanisms for developing and considering equity impact statements.

The mission of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is to improve the health, safety, education, economic well-being, and development of Rhode Island's children with a commitment to equity and the elimination of unacceptable disparities by race, ethnicity, disability, zip code, immigration status, neighborhood, and income, so this legislation is deeply connected both to our ongoing work and to our mission.

We urge this committee to consider how Equity Impact Statements could help this body ensure that budgets and legislation that are being drafted, considered, and passed are sound and fair and could serve as a tool for increasing equity and decreasing disparities. We stand ready to support these efforts in whatever way we can and have already expressed our willingness to support the CHAE in their efforts.

Thank you for the work you do to ensure that Rhode Island is a state where all children and youth have the opportunity to develop, thrive, and succeed, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

