



Testimony Re: House Bill 7594 - BILINGUAL, DUAL LANGUAGE AND WORLD LANGUAGE TEACHERS INVESTMENT ACT

House Finance Committee

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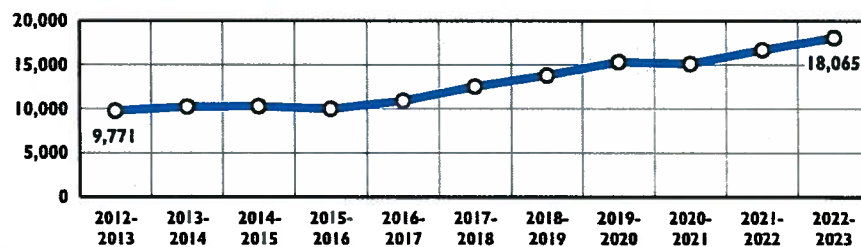


Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 7594 and thank Representative Morales for sponsoring the bill and Representatives Cruz, Shallcross Smith, Biah, DeSimone, Kislak, Potter, Giraldo, Kazarian, and Diaz for co-sponsoring. This act authorizes the Office the of Postsecondary Commissioner to create a program for giving teaching certificates to bilingual, dual language, and world language teachers in urban and urban ring schools. It also sets up two scholarship programs to boost the number of teachers in those schools and outlines who can apply for the scholarships.

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As the local population, economy, and workforce continue to change, there has been a shift in how cities and towns nationwide support Multilingual Learners (MLLs). Rhode Island has taken several steps to ensure that all children have access to high-quality education and to recognize multilingualism as an asset. These critical steps included instituting categorical funds to support MLLs, although more support is needed in this area, and implementing the Seal of Biliteracy which allows high school students who receive the Silver or Gold Seal of Biliteracy to earn college credits towards a minor or major degree in a world language at the state's public higher education institutions.

**Multilingual Learners, Rhode Island,
2012-2013 Through 2022-2023 School Years**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2012-2013 through 2022-2023 school years.

The number of MLL students in Rhode Island has nearly doubled (increased by 85%) from the 2012-2013 to 2022-2023 school years. During the 2022-2023 school year, there were 18,065 MLL students in Rhode Island, representing 13% of all students enrolled in public school from preschool through grade 12.

MLLs are the fastest-growing groups of students in large urban districts and many smaller cities and suburban communities.

For example, from the 2009-2010 school year to the 2022-2023 school year, **the percentage of Newport MLL/EL students grew from 3% to 19%**. In 2023, 13% of third grade MLL students met expectations in math, compared to 39% of non-MLL students, and 10% met expectations in English language arts on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, compared to 42% of non-MLL students. In addition, the overall four-year high school graduation rate for the Class of 2023 was 84%, while the rate for MLLs was only 69%.

Dual language programs involve students engaging in material in two languages (e.g., students spend half the day learning English and half learning in another language). Researchers have shown promising results in using dual language programs, particularly in low-income communities. Dual language programs can improve English reading proficiency, decrease dropout rates, increase the likelihood of going to college, and improve economic outcomes for MLL students.

This is why it's crucial to increase the pipeline of dual language and world language educators who speak the language and have the cultural context to relate and connect with students and their families. In October 2023, only 2% (227) of Rhode Island public school teachers and instructional coordinators held an active Bilingual, Dual Language, or English to Speakers of Other Languages certification. This bill would increase the pipeline of educators that can support MLL students.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT was pleased to serve on the Blueprint for Multilingual Learner (MLL) Success Team convened by the Rhode Island Department of Education alongside dedicated students, parents, educators, and community stakeholders to identify, implement, and sustain more effective policies and practices for MLL students in Rhode Island. This bill aligns with the Blueprint's strategic plan to secure and fund evidence-based, sustained, and purposeful MLL professional learning for all educators and leaders across and within systems and expanding high-quality dual language programs.

We thank the General Assembly for their commitment to Rhode Island students and ask you to support this bill which will celebrate the cultural and language diversity these students bring to our classrooms and ensure that all children have access to the high-quality education they need to succeed in school, career, and life.