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Testimony Re: House Joint Resolution 7771 -AN APPROPRIATION OF \$500,000 FOR THE RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL FOR PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

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 Joint Resolution 7771 and thank Representative Morales for sponsoring this resolution in the House and Representatives Alzate, Stewart, Giraldo, Diaz, J. Lombardi, Tanzi, Potter, Kislak, and Handy for co-sponsoring. This resolution proposes allocating \$500,000 to the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner for the Rhode Island School for Progressive Education.

Educators of Color benefit all students, especially Students of Color. Students of Color demonstrate long-term academic achievement including higher reading and math test scores, decreased likelihood of dropping out of high school, increased likelihood of going to college, and increased social and emotional development in classes with Teachers of Color. Research shows that Students of Color fare better on standardized tests, have improved attendance, and are less likely to be suspended when they have at least one Educator of Color. In that same study, the presence of even one Black teacher in elementary school decreases the likelihood of a Black male student dropping out by nearly 40%. In October 2022, 52% of Rhode Island public school students were white, 30% were Hispanic and 9% were Black while 88% (12,474) of Rhode Island public school educators identified as white, 5% (648) as Hispanic, and 3% (361) as Black.

Diversity among educators is also crucial for supporting Multilingual Learners (MLL). 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. However, 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 resolution would increase the pipeline of educators that can support MLL students.

Addressing diversity among educators is not only an equity issue but also critical for the academic success and well-being of all students, particularly for Students of Color. A key strategy for increasing the pipeline is by ensuring that programs and schools, such as the Rhode Island School for Progressive Education, receive adequate funding to fulfill their mission of ensuring greater representation in our public schools.

We thank the General Assembly for their commitment to Rhode Island students and ask you to support this resolution which will support the cultural and language diversity these students bring to our classrooms and ensure that all children have educators who reflect their experiences.