



**Testimony Re: House Bill 7036 -- An Act Relating to Education --The Education Equity and Property Tax Relief Act – Civic Education  
House Finance Committee**

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**Jessica Vega, 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 7036 and thank Representative Speakman for sponsoring this bill and Representatives Donovan, Biah, Carson, Henries, Cotter, Cortvriend, Kislak, and Boylan for co-sponsoring. This legislation proposes the establishment of a new fund solely allocated for civic education, to be managed and implemented by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education through a request for proposal process.

Civic education can inspire young people to engage in their communities, start voting earlier, and interact more with elected officials. It can also empower young people to overcome challenges by learning how to advocate for themselves. However, many American schools lack opportunities for students to participate in civic engagement, creating what is referred to as "civic deserts." Because of this students may lack basic knowledge about the structure of government, the electoral process, and their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Civic education helps students acquire the tools to meaningfully engage in civics.

In addition, high school social studies teachers, who play an important role in civic education, often lack support. They often have larger class sizes and take on additional non-teaching responsibilities, such as coaching school sports. This bill will help address these challenges by providing teachers with more opportunities for professional development in civic education.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is the lead convener of the Anti-Racist Education Policy Collaborative in partnership with youth and parent organizations, including Youth in Action, Young Voice, ARISE (Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians), Providence Student Union, and Parents Leading for Education Equity (PLEE). Within this collaborative, youth have helped develop state legislation, attended meetings to discuss and debrief on legislation, and provided both written and verbal testimony on issues that include alternatives to out-of-school suspension, Healthy School Meals for All, and granting the chair of the Youth Advisory Council the right to vote on the Council and Secondary Education.

Civic education strengthens our democracy and empowers youth to become advocates for change in their communities. Civic education also helps students develop critical thinking skills and fosters a culture of belonging and tolerance, as students are provided the opportunity to debate and share their ideas in the safe space of their classrooms.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.