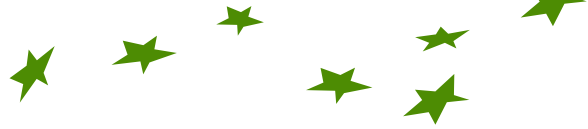




★ Legislative Wrap-Up



2007 SESSION OF THE RHODE ISLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Selected laws and budget appropriations affecting children in the areas of economic well-being, health, education, child care and early childhood education, and safety.

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Affordable Housing: \$12.5 million in bonds was allocated in the budget for the first year of funding from the \$50 million bond passed by voters in November 2006 for the production of affordable housing. +

Neighborhood Opportunities Program: The budget includes \$7.5 million for the Neighborhood Opportunities Program to address affordable housing. +*

Family Independence Program (FIP): The General Assembly maintained the "child support pass-through" at \$50 monthly. The first \$50 of child support paid on time each month by the non-custodial parent on behalf of a child enrolled in FIP goes to the custodial parent.*

Food Stamp Outreach: \$100,000 was allocated to Food Stamp outreach as part of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services' budget to enroll eligible individuals and families in the Food Stamp Program.*

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): A bill did not pass that would have increased the proportion of the state EITC that is fully refundable from 15% to 100% for the 2007 taxable year and each subsequent taxable year.*

RIte Care Eligibility: A bill that would have restored eligibility to income-eligible non-citizen children did not pass. A second bill that would have increased income eligibility for RIte Care from 250% to 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL), restored coverage to legally present immigrant children and created a RIte Care buy-in for children in families with income above 300% FPL was not enacted.*

Access to Dental Care: A bill to increase access to dental care for low-income children did not pass. The bill would have increased the number of children enrolled in the RIte Smiles Dental Benefits Manager Program.*

Oral Health Care for Pregnant Women: The Rhode Island Department of Human Services' budget includes funds to implement a preventive dental and periodontal program for pregnant women.

Lead Poisoning: \$650,000 was restored in the Fiscal Year 2008 budget to the Housing Resources Commission for the lead hazard reduction program, a 43% decrease from the \$1.5 million enacted for Fiscal Year 2007. Funding for environmental lead inspections was reduced in the Rhode Island Department of Health's budget. +

HEALTH

Childhood Obesity: A bill was passed that requires Rhode Island high schools that sell or distribute beverages and snacks on their premises to offer healthier beverages and snacks starting January 1, 2008.

RIte Care: The General Assembly maintained the RIte Care program, including the benefits package, current eligibility levels for children up to 250% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and coverage for parents up to 185% of the FPL.*

EDUCATION

State Aid to Education: \$691.1 million was appropriated for school aid. The same level of local education operating aid appropriated for Fiscal Year 2007 was allocated for Fiscal Year 2008.

Dropout Prevention: The *Rhode Island High School Dropout Prevention Act of 2007* passed. The legislation promotes a three-part strategy to reduce dropout rates in Rhode Island public school districts through targeted dropout prevention programs, changes to the steps students must take to drop out of school,

continued

and promoting a “fast track to college” program that enables students to earn a high school diploma while earning college credits.

In-state Tuition for Youth who are Undocumented: The General Assembly did not pass a bill that would allow undocumented Rhode Island high school graduates (who have been admitted to a Rhode Island public higher education institution and meet certain residency requirements) to pay in-state tuition and fees at public higher education institutions in Rhode Island.*

CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Child Care Subsidy Eligibility: The income limit for the subsidized child care program was reduced from 225% FPL (\$38,633 for family of 3) to 180% FPL (\$30,906). Children ages 13 to 15 are no longer eligible for child care subsidies. As a result, an estimated 2,000 children will lose their child care subsidies.*

Child Care Subsidy Co-payments: Child care co-pays were increased for families with incomes over 100% of the FPL. Co-payments increased by 1% of family income.*

Child Care Market Rate Adjustment: The scheduled adjustment in rates paid by the state to child care providers caring for children from low-income families was delayed until July 1, 2008. The reimbursement rate continues to be frozen at the 2002 market rate level.*

Quality Rating System: The General Assembly passed a bill to establish a voluntary quality rating system for child care centers, preschools, family child care homes, and school-age child care programs. The quality rating system is a public-private partnership that will assess the quality of early care and education programs and school-age child care in Rhode Island.

School-Aged Child Care: The rate the state pays child care providers for providing before-school and after-school care for children from low-income families was restructured which will reduce payments to providers.*

SAFETY

Services for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care: The General Assembly restored \$10.5 million dollars to the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) budget for services to the 18-21 year old population, approximately half of the proposed cut of \$19 million. The General Assembly maintained categorical eligibility for 18-21 year olds (who were in the care of DCYF prior to or at the time of their 18th birthday) to obtain services in a voluntary aftercare service network. DCYF will be required to manage the provision of these aftercare services within the \$10.5 million allocated. Youth with serious emotional disturbances, autism or a functional developmental disability will continue to have their cases managed by DCYF and remain legally entitled to services through age 21.*

Foster Care Licensing: A bill passed that requires the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families to conduct a state and national criminal record check on any individual seeking to be licensed as a foster parent.

Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations: The General Assembly maintained child abuse and neglect investigations by the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families for youth ages 16 and older.

Juvenile Justice: Budget Article 22 rolled back the jurisdiction of the Rhode Island Family Court from age 21 to age 17. Seventeen year-olds who commit an offense which if committed by an adult would constitute a felony or a misdemeanor will be referred to an adult court and incarcerated at the Adult Correctional Institutions. This law also limits sentences to the Rhode Island Training School to age 19 (for youth who begin their sentence prior to age 17). The Governor's budget had proposed that sentences at the Training School be limited to age 18, but this cut was partially restored to age 19. A bill with an alternative plan to achieve cost savings by diverting lower-end juvenile offenders to community-based diversion programs instead of the Training School was proposed at the end of the session.

FISCAL YEAR 2008 BUDGET

The 2007 Rhode Island General Assembly session began with an estimated budget deficit of \$243 million for Fiscal Year 2008. The Rhode Island General Assembly enacted a budget in the amount of \$6.98 billion. The Governor vetoed the budget. The General Assembly overrode the Governor's veto and enacted the \$6.98 billion budget, a 4.7% increase from the \$6.66 billion enacted for Fiscal Year 2007. \$3.4 billion of the budget is state general revenue, \$2 billion is federal funds, \$162.6 million is restricted revenue, and \$1.4 billion is other funds.

One Rhode Island

One Rhode Island is a coalition of over 150 advocacy, religious, social service and policy organizations which promotes a platform of income and work supports for low- and moderate-income Rhode Islanders.

HousingWorks RI

HousingWorks RI is a partnership of more than 100 organizations working to ensure there is adequate housing to sustain and expand Rhode Island's economy.

* This item was included in the *One Rhode Island Platform*.

+ This item was included in the *HousingWorks RI Platform*.

2007 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Legislative Wrap-Up



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