



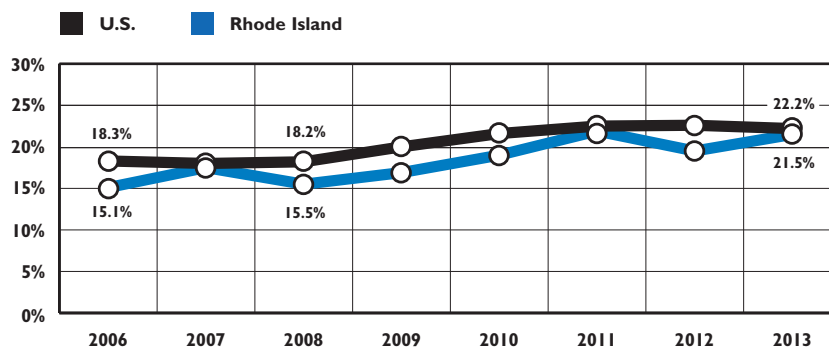
Issue Brief

Child Poverty in Rhode Island

Children most at risk of not achieving their full potential are children who live in poverty. Children in poverty, especially those in poverty for extended periods of time, are more likely to have physical and behavioral health problems, live in food insecure households, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, earn less as adults, be unemployed more frequently, and fall below the poverty line at least once later in their lives.^{1,2,3,4} While over half (53%) of all poor children in Rhode Island are White, children of color and children of immigrants are more likely to grow up poor.^{5,6,7} Single parenthood, low educational attainment, part-time or no employment and low wages of parents place children at risk of being poor.^{8,9}

Addressing child poverty in Rhode Island requires a multi-faceted approach, including strategies that attract high-wage jobs, improve the education levels of our current and future workforce and provide access to job training, literacy programs and English language acquisition. Access to affordable, quality child care and health care can help to mitigate the negative effects of poverty on children.

Children in Poverty, U.S. and Rhode Island, 2006-2013



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006-2013. Table R1704.

- ◆ In 2013, 21.5% (44,923) of Rhode Island's 208,700 children under the age of 18 lived below the federal poverty threshold. Although there are signs that it is beginning to decline, Rhode Island's child poverty rate remains significantly higher than it was prior to the recession.
- ◆ Rhode Island's child poverty rates rose from 15.5% in 2008 to 21.5% in 2013, while the U.S. rates increased from 18.2% to 22.2% during that same time period. The effects of the recession, which was the longest on record since World War II, persisted well past the official end of the recession and are only just beginning to decline at the national level.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006-2013. Tables R1704 and C17024.

Children Living in Poverty, Rhode Island, 2000 and 2009-2013

CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18 LIVING BELOW POVERTY, 2009-2013

CITY/TOWN	CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18 LIVING BELOW POVERTY, 2000		ESTIMATES WITH HIGH MARGINS OF ERROR*		ESTIMATES WITH LOWER, ACCEPTABLE MARGINS OF ERROR	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Barrington	127	2.7%			53	1.2%
Bristol	436	10.0%			167	4.8%
Burrillville	236	6.0%	372	11.7%		
Central Falls	2,210	40.9%	2,334	41.1%		
Charlestown	78	4.7%	273	18.3%		
Coventry	481	5.9%			866	11.6%
Cranston	1,496	9.1%			2,189	13.9%
Cumberland	237	3.1%			480	6.4%
East Greenwich	147	4.1%	207	6.5%		
East Providence	1,126	10.8%			1,592	16.7%
Exeter	112	7.5%	80	6.6%		
Foster	32	2.9%	66	7.9%		
Glocester	178	6.7%			82	4.6%
Hopkinton	115	5.9%	50	3.6%		
Jamestown	17	1.4%	103	10.6%		
Johnston	527	9.0%			642	11.7%
Lincoln	329	6.5%			232	5.0%
Little Compton	8	1.0%	37	5.7%		
Middletown	264	6.2%			666	16.8%
Narragansett	235	8.6%			127	5.6%
New Shoreham	19	10.2%	21	23.1%		
Newport	1,267	24.4%	533	14.5%		
North Kingstown	663	9.7%			683	11.1%
North Providence	579	10.1%			630	12.1%
North Smithfield	72	3.0%			163	7.1%
Pawtucket	4,542	25.3%			4,550	28.9%
Portsmouth	118	2.8%			250	7.4%
Providence	18,045	40.5%			16,049	39.7%
Richmond	82	4.2%	134	7.3%		
Scituate	113	4.3%	174	8.6%		
Smithfield	153	3.9%			66	1.8%
South Kingstown	324	5.3%			247	4.9%
Tiverton	92	2.8%			133	4.4%
Warren	205	8.4%			230	11.1%
Warwick	1,243	6.7%			1,260	8.4%
West Greenwich	40	2.7%	74	5.1%		
West Warwick	1,186	18.1%	1,309	22.4%		
Westerly	534	10.0%	901	18.9%		
Woonsocket	3,494	31.8%	4,222	42.8%		
Four Core Cities	28,291	35.9%			27,155	37.9%
Remainder of State	12,871	7.8%			15,092	10.4%
Rhode Island	41,162	16.9%			42,247	19.5%

Source: Data are from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3, P87 and PCT:50 and from a Population Reference Bureau analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009-2013. Table B17001.

Four core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence and Woonsocket.

*The Margin of Error around the estimate is greater than or equal to five percentage points. For more information, see the Methodology section of the annual *Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*.

Census Changes Affecting Poverty Estimates

- ◆ Prior to the *2012 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*, data on child poverty was based on the most recent decennial Census. However, starting with Census 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau shortened the length of the decennial Census survey and no longer included questions on employment, education, or income. To address the absence of detailed socioeconomic data in the decennial survey and provide more timely annual data on socioeconomic characteristics, the U.S. Census Bureau created the American Community Survey (ACS), an ongoing statistical survey that samples a percentage of the population. More detailed socioeconomic information, once collected in the decennial Census survey, is now collected in the ACS.
- ◆ In order to provide the most reliable data on Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT uses the five-year ACS estimates. While these data are the best estimates of child poverty available, estimates for small communities and communities with relatively low poverty rates are not as reliable as estimates for larger communities and communities with higher poverty rates.

Change in Core City Definition

- ◆ Prior to 2012, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT defined the core cities as communities where more than 15% of children lived in poverty. The six core cities were Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick, and Woonsocket.
- ◆ Beginning with the *2012 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*, the definition of core cities was changed to identify the four communities with the highest percentages of children living in poverty. According to the 2009-2013 ACS, more than one in four (25%) children lived below the poverty threshold in each of these cities. The new four core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009-2013. Table B17001.

Child Poverty in New England

- ◆ In 2013, Rhode Island had the highest child poverty rate in New England.

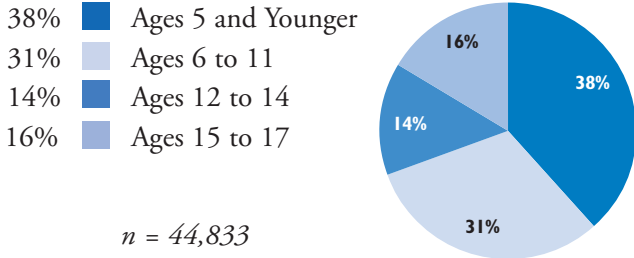
Children in Poverty, New England, 2013

STATE	PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY
Connecticut	14.5%
Maine	17.7%
Massachusetts	16.3%
New Hampshire	10.2%
Rhode Island	21.5%
Vermont	15.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013. Table R1704.

Rhode Island's Poor Children, 2011-2013

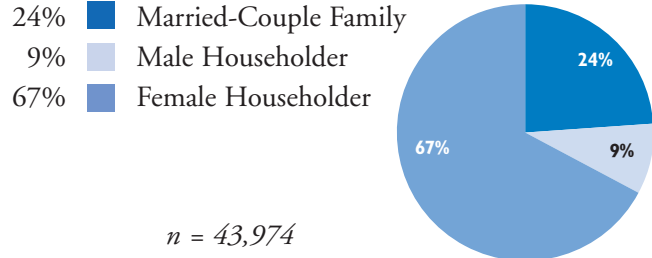
By Age



- ◆ Between 2011 and 2013, more than one-third (38%) of Rhode Island's poor children were ages five and younger. Both nationally, and in Rhode Island, young children from birth through age five are more likely to be poor.
- ◆ Between 2011 and 2013, 26% (17,237) of all Rhode Island children under age six were living below the poverty threshold.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2013. Table B17001.

By Family Structure*

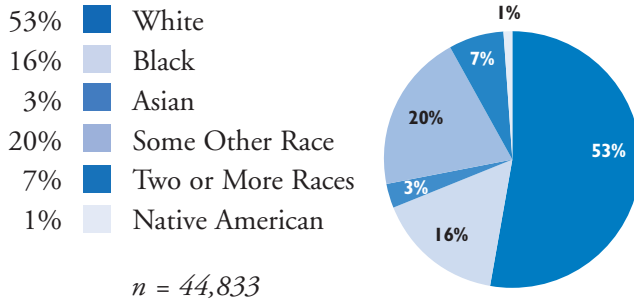


*Only includes related children living in households.

- ◆ Children in single-parent families are more likely to live in poverty than those in two-parent families. Between 2011 and 2013, 76% of all poor children lived in single-parent families and 24% lived in two-parent families.
- ◆ Between 2011 and 2013, 40% of children in single-parent households lived in poverty, compared to 8% in married-couple households.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2013. Table B17006.

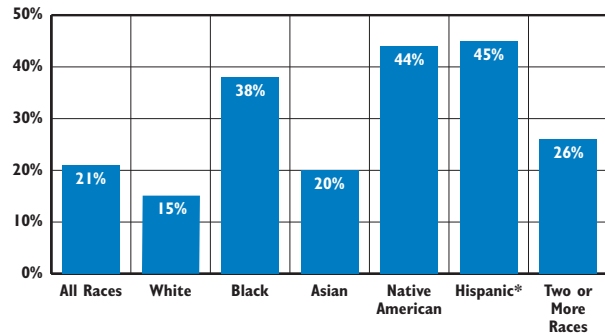
By Race Percentage of all poor children



- ◆ Of all children living in poverty in Rhode Island between 2011 and 2013, over half (53%) were White, 16% were Black, 3% were Asian, 1% were Native American, 20% were Some other race, and 7% were Two or more races.
- ◆ Using Census definitions, Hispanic children may be included in any race category. Between 2011 and 2013, 47% (21,073) of Rhode Island's poor children were Hispanic.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2013. Tables S1701, B17020A, B17020B, B17020C, B17020D, B17020E, B17020G, and B17020I.

Percentage of all Children of a Specified Race/Ethnicity



- ◆ While more than half of all poor children in Rhode Island are White, minority children are much more likely to be living in poverty.
- ◆ Between 2011 and 2013 in Rhode Island, 45% of Hispanic children, 44% of Native American children, 38% of Black children, and 20% of Asian children lived in families with incomes below the poverty threshold, compared to 15% of White children.

*Hispanic children may be included in any race category.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2013. Tables S1701, B17020A, B17020B, B17020C, B17020D, B17020E, B17020G, and B17020I.

Children Living in Extreme Poverty

- ◆ Families with incomes below 50% of the federal poverty threshold are considered to be living in extreme poverty. In 2013, the extreme poverty level was \$9,385 for a family of three with two children and \$11,812 for a family of four with two children.¹⁰
- ◆ Of the 44,923 children living below the poverty threshold in Rhode Island in 2013, 43% lived in extreme poverty. In total, an estimated 9% (19,262) of all children in Rhode Island lived in extreme poverty.¹¹

The Effects of Poverty on Young Children

- ◆ The negative effects of poverty on children last well beyond childhood into adolescence and adulthood. Poverty, as well as child maltreatment and exposure to violence, is linked to toxic stress, which adversely alters early brain development that serves as the basis for learning, behavior and health later in life.¹²

Adult Outcomes by Poverty Status Between the Prenatal Year and Age Five

	INCOME BELOW THE POVERTY LINE (MEAN OR %)	INCOME BETWEEN ONE AND TWO TIMES THE POVERTY LINE (MEAN OR %)	INCOME MORE THAN TWICE THE POVERTY LINE (MEAN OR %)
Completed schooling	11.8 yrs	12.7 yrs	14.0 yrs
Earnings (\$1,000)*	\$17.9	\$26.8	\$39.7
Annual work hours	1,512	1,839	1,963
Food Stamps*	\$896	\$337	\$70
Poor health	13%	13%	5%
Arrested (men only)	26%	21%	13%
Nonmarital birth (women only)	50%	28%	9%

Source: Duncan, G. J. & Magnuson, K. (Winter 2011). The long reach of child poverty. *Pathways: A magazine of poverty, inequality and social policy*, 22-27.
*Earnings and Food Stamp values are in 2005 dollars.

- ◆ Compared with children in families with incomes at least twice the federal poverty threshold, children who are poor between the prenatal period and age five complete less school and as adults earn less, work fewer hours, receive more Food Stamp assistance, are more likely to report poor health, are more likely to be arrested, and are more likely to give birth while under age 21 and unmarried.¹³

Early and Sustained Interventions Can Reduce the Effects of Poverty on Children

- ◆ Children born into families living in poverty face barriers to success at each stage of life from birth through adulthood. However, targeted interventions can improve children's outcomes and close gaps between low- and higher-income children.
- ◆ Earlier interventions are more effective than later interventions for improving outcomes, but alone may not be enough to improve outcomes in adulthood. Studies show that investing in evidence-based interventions early and throughout a child's life course would have larger and longer-lasting effects on adult outcomes. Cost-benefit analyses indicate that the total cost of these programs would be outweighed by the benefits because the lifetime incomes of individuals would increase and society would gain from extra taxes paid and reductions in costs associated with crime, poor health, and other social problems.

Source: Sawhill, I. V. & Karpilow, Q. (2014). *How much could we improve children's life chances by intervening early and often?* CCF Brief, 54.
Retrieved July 14, 2014, from www.brookings.edu

Four Measures of Family Finances

The Federal Poverty Threshold

- ◆ In 2013, the official *federal poverty threshold* was \$18,769 for a family of three with two children and \$23,624 for a family of four with two children.¹⁴ The official poverty threshold was set by the federal government in 1963, and was based on the cost of a minimum diet for a family of four. The cost of food was multiplied by three, since at that time about one-third of after-tax expenditures of families were spent on food. The poverty threshold is adjusted annually according to the increase in the Consumer Price Index. The method of calculating the poverty threshold has not been adjusted to address the changes in family expenditures since its development in the 1960s, particularly the rising costs of housing, transportation, child care, and medical care. It also does not consider geographic variations in the cost of living.¹⁵

Supplemental Poverty Measure

- ◆ In 2010, the federal Interagency Technical Working Group began developing a *Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)* that is more complex and comprehensive than the federal poverty threshold in terms of how it estimates economic need. Tax payments and work expenses are included in family resource estimates and expenditures on basic necessities (food, shelter, clothing and utilities) and are adjusted for geographic differences. The SPM does not replace the official poverty measure, but serves as an additional indicator of economic well-being and provide a deeper understanding of economic conditions and the impact of policy decisions and show the effects of taxes and in-kind transfers on the poor.^{16,17}

The Federal Poverty Guidelines

- ◆ The federal poverty threshold, previously described, is used by the Census Bureau to calculate all official poverty population statistics. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) uses a simplified version of the federal poverty threshold, called the *federal poverty guidelines (or federal poverty levels)*, for administrative purposes, such as determining financial eligibility for certain federal programs. In 2014, the Federal Poverty Level (100% FPL) for a family of three was \$19,790.¹⁸ Many government assistance programs for low-income people now use income eligibility limits that are higher than the federal poverty level in order to help families meet their basic needs.

Family Income Level Based on the Federal Poverty Guidelines

2014 FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES	ANNUAL INCOME FAMILY OF THREE	ANNUAL INCOME FAMILY OF FOUR
50% FPL	\$9,895	\$11,925
100% FPL	\$19,790	\$23,850
130% FPL	\$25,727	\$31,005
185% FPL	\$36,612	\$44,123
200% FPL	\$39,580	\$47,700
225% FPL	\$44,528	\$53,663
250% FPL	\$49,475	\$59,625

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2014). 2014 Federal Poverty Guidelines. *Federal Register*, 79(14), 3593-3594.

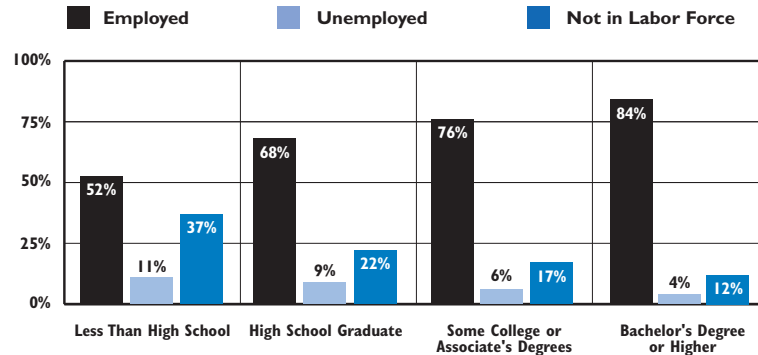
The Rhode Island Standard of Need

- ◆ *The Rhode Island Standard of Need*, a measure calculated by the Economic Progress Institute, considers multiple factors, including the costs of housing, food, transportation, child care and health care as well as the cash value of tax credits and income support programs (e.g., SNAP, child care assistance, RIte Care) to show what it costs for families to make ends meet. In 2014, a single parent raising a preschooler and a school-aged child would need \$51,492 a year to meet its basic needs, over two and a half times the federal poverty level for a family of three (\$19,790).¹⁹

Improving Parental Education and Employment

- ◆ Increasing the education, skills and training of low-income and unemployed (or underemployed) parents is vital to economic success and child and family well-being.^{20,21} The need for workers with postsecondary training and education is increasing presently, and will intensify in the near future. By 2020, 71% of all jobs in Rhode Island will require some postsecondary training beyond high school.²²
- ◆ One in seven (14%) Rhode Island adults over age 25 had less than a high school education in 2013. Of these adults, 25% (23,982) had incomes below the poverty threshold.²³

Employment Status by Education Attainment, Rhode Island Adults, 2011-2013



- ◆ Adults with higher levels of education were more likely to be in the labor force and to be employed in Rhode Island between 2011 and 2013.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2013. Table B23006. Note: Data refer to population ages 25 to 64. Individuals in the Armed Forces are considered employed.

Educating Children in Poverty

- ◆ In Rhode Island, students in the core cities consistently have lower reading and math proficiency rates, have lower graduation rates, and attend lower performing schools than their peers in the remainder of the state.

Education Indicators of Success, Core Cities and Rhode Island, 2012-2013

CORE CITY	PERCENT OF 4TH GRADERS WITH READING PROFICIENCY	PERCENT OF 4TH GRADERS WITH MATH PROFICIENCY	HIGH SCHOOL# GRADUATION RATES	PERCENT OF SCHOOLS NOT SUBJECT TO STATE INTERVENTION
Central Falls	44%	42%	74%	25%
Pawtucket	62%	50%	75%	87%
Providence	52%	39%	71%	46%
Woonsocket	53%	50%	61%	100%
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>54%</i>	<i>43%</i>	<i>71%</i>	<i>62%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>79%</i>	<i>71%</i>	<i>85%</i>	<i>99%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>71%</i>	<i>63%</i>	<i>80%</i>	<i>90%</i>

Sources: Rhode Island Department of Education, *New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP)*, October 2013. Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2013. Rhode Island Department of Education, 2012-2013.

- ◆ High poverty schools that are successful at raising student achievement have strong leaders, regularly communicate high expectations for students and staff, nurture positive relationships among adults and students, have a strong focus on academics, use student data to individualize instruction, make decisions collaboratively, employ enthusiastic and diligent teachers, and effectively select, cultivate and use personnel.^{24,25}

State and Federal Programs Improving the Lives of Low-Income Children and Families in Rhode Island

RI Works

- ◆ The goal of the Rhode Island Works Program (RI Works) is to help parents make successful transitions to work by providing cash assistance and work supports, including employment services, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, health insurance and subsidized child care. RI Works replaced the Family Independence Program (FIP) in 2008.²⁶ In December 2013, there were 4,562 adults and 10,076 children under age 18 enrolled in RI Works. More than two-thirds (69%) of RI Works beneficiaries were children, and nearly half (47%) of the children enrolled in RI Works were under the age of six.²⁷

RItE Care/RItE Share Health Coverage

- ◆ RItE Care, Rhode Island's Medicaid managed care health insurance program for low-income children and families, provides comprehensive quality health care for children under age 19 with family incomes less than 261% FPL, for pregnant women with family incomes less than 253% FPL, and for parents of eligible children under age 18 with family incomes less than 133% FPL. As of December 2013, RItE Care had an enrollment of 85,627 children who qualified for coverage based on income. RItE Care also covers specific groups of children who qualify based on a disability or because they are in foster care or receiving an adoption subsidy.^{28,29} Families who meet RItE Care income eligibility guidelines are enrolled in the RItE Share premium assistance program if a parent works for an employer who offers a qualifying health plan. The family is enrolled in the employer's plan and the state pays the employee's share of the premium. As of December 2013, RItE Share enrollment was 7,834 children and 3,065 parents.^{30,31}

Child Care Assistance

- ◆ In 2013 in Rhode Island, 69% (44,256) of children under age six had all available parents in the labor force.³² The quality and stability of a child care setting is crucial to a parent's ability to work and to the child's development.³³ Child care costs represent a significant part of a low-income family's budget. In 2011, families with children under age 15 living below the poverty threshold spent 30% of their income each month on child care, compared to 8% for families above the threshold.³⁴ In Rhode Island, families with children under age 13, who work 20 or more hours per week and earn less than 180% FPL are eligible for child care assistance.³⁵ In December 2013, there were 7,616 child care subsidies in Rhode Island, down from 7,849 in December 2012. Since peaking in 2003, there has been a 47% decrease in the number of child care subsidies.³⁶

Early Head Start and Head Start

- ◆ The Early Head Start and Head Start programs are two-generation programs that provide comprehensive early education and support services to very low-income children and families (under 130% FPL). As of October 2013, there were 515 pregnant women, infants, and toddlers enrolled in Early Head Start and 2,040 preschool children enrolled in Head Start.³⁷ Children who participate in Head Start show improvements in math, language, and literacy skills and have fewer behavior problems.³⁸

State Pre-Kindergarten

- ◆ In 2008, the General Assembly passed *The Rhode Island Prekindergarten Education Act*, acknowledging the need to adequately prepare all children to succeed in school by providing access to publicly funded, high-quality Pre-K. Rhode Island began offering a State Pre-K program to four-year-olds during the 2009-2010 school year, and by the 2014-2015 school year there were 17 State Pre-K classrooms in Rhode Island with a total of 306 children enrolled.³⁹ This program has been found to improve children's language and literacy skills and help close the achievement gap between low-income children and their more affluent peers.⁴⁰

Nutrition Assistance Programs

- ◆ Federal nutrition programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch Program, the National School Breakfast Program, and the Summer Food Service Program, provide nutrition assistance to low-income children and families. In October 2013 in Rhode Island, there were 105,644 adults and 64,911 children enrolled in SNAP.⁴¹ In September 2013, there were 26,633 women, infants, and children enrolled in WIC.⁴² In October 2013, there were 66,172 low-income students enrolled in the Free- and Reduced-Price Lunch Program and, on average, 25,958 participated in the School Breakfast Program on a daily basis.⁴³

Child Support

- ◆ Child support provides a mechanism for non-custodial parents to contribute to the financial support of their children. The receipt of regular child support payments can significantly improve the economic well-being of a child in a family with a non-resident parent. Custodial parents who receive steady child support payments are less likely to receive cash assistance and more likely to find work faster and stay employed longer than those who do not.⁴⁴ In 2013, just over half (51%) of non-custodial parents under court order in Rhode Island were making child support payments on time and in full.⁴⁵

Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program

- ◆ The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) provides assistance to low-income households who may have difficulty paying their energy bills. In Rhode Island, LIHEAP is administered by the Office of Energy Resources and delivered locally by Rhode Island's network of Community Action Programs (CAPs). In Fiscal Year 2013, Rhode Island was allocated nearly \$24 million in LIHEAP funding, which was used to provide 27,731 low-income Rhode Island families with heating assistance.^{46,47}

Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8)

- ◆ Families that spend more than 30% of their monthly income on housing face a cost burden and may have difficulty affording other basic needs, such as food, clothing, and health care. In 2013, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Rhode Island was \$1,154. A family of three living at the federal poverty level would have to spend 71% of its income to pay this rent.^{48,49} Rental vouchers can help low-income families afford the high cost of housing; however, there are not enough federally-funded Housing Choice vouchers to meet the need.⁵⁰

The Earned Income Tax Credit Makes a Difference for Working Families

- ◆ The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a refundable federal income tax credit for low-income working individuals and families. In 2014, 84,091 Rhode Island working families and individuals received a total of \$190 million in tax credits from EITC for tax year 2013.⁵¹
- ◆ The federal EITC program is the nation's most effective antipoverty program for working families. In 2012, the EITC lifted 6.5 million people, including 3.3 million children, out of poverty. EITC recipients are more likely to work and earn higher wages, and their children are more likely to do better in school, attend college, and earn more as adults.⁵²
- ◆ Twenty states and the District of Columbia offer state EITCs that build on the success of the federal EITC by rewarding work, reducing poverty, and helping families make ends meet. In 2014, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation that decreased the state's EITC from 25% to 10% of the federal EITC and made the credit fully refundable.^{53,54}

Recommendations

Work Supports, Income, and Financial Asset Building

- ◆ Improve access to work support programs, including RIte Care, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, child care assistance, and RI Works, by helping families access all programs for which they are eligible, facilitating cross-program enrollment, reducing documentation requirements, simplifying renewal processes, and improving communications. These programs can help families meet their basic needs and move out of poverty and have a proven impact on long-term job retention and asset accumulation.⁵⁵
- ◆ Eliminate the periodic time limit for RI Works, which currently allows families to only receive cash assistance for up to 24 months in any 60-month period.
- ◆ Help parents enrolled in RI Works successfully transition to work by addressing barriers to employment, connecting parents to education and training opportunities, and identifying career pathways to family-sustaining wages.
- ◆ Help working poor families build financial assets by eliminating the asset test for RI Works, providing financial literacy training, protecting families from predatory mortgage lending and payday lending, and expanding access to convenient, cost-effective, and safe financial services that would allow families to keep more of their earnings, save, and invest.
- ◆ Increase Rhode Island's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) from 10% of the federal EITC to 20% of the federal EITC while keeping it fully refundable.

Health Coverage

- ◆ Ensure access for all children to affordable, comprehensive health and dental coverage, including RIte Care and RIte Smiles.
- ◆ Maximize all options available through the federal *Affordable Care Act* to create opportunities for children and families to get and keep affordable health coverage.

Housing

- ◆ Prioritize federal funds, Housing Bond funds, and funds from the increased real estate conveyance tax to build, rehabilitate, and subsidize long-term, affordable housing and provide services for families with little or no income.⁵⁶
- ◆ Prevent homelessness by allocating resources for shelter diversion programs, rapid re-housing, and housing stabilization.⁵⁷
- ◆ Invest adequate funding in the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to ensure that all those who are eligible can receive assistance and protect families with young children from utility shut-offs.

Child Care and Early Education

- ◆ Restore child care assistance eligibility back to 225% FPL. Absent a full restoration, make the Child Care Transition Program permanent so that currently eligible families can continue to participate in the program as family income increases up to 225% FPL and allow currently eligible working families to access additional hours of subsidized child care in order to participate in job training or education programs. Families rely on child care to enable them to work and to provide the early education experiences needed to prepare their children for school.⁵⁸

- ◆ Invest in high-quality early education programs for young children and families, including Early Head Start, Head Start, State Pre-K, and full-day kindergarten.

Teen Pregnancy Prevention and Support for Teen Parents

- ◆ Improve access to health care services (including family planning) and comprehensive sex education for teens. Teen pregnancy and parenting threaten the development of teen parents as well as their children. Teen parents are less likely to have the financial resources, social supports and parenting skills needed for healthy child development. Children born to teens are more likely to experience child maltreatment, have learning and behavior problems, live in poverty, go to prison, and become teen parents themselves.^{59,60}
- ◆ Expand education and economic opportunity for vulnerable teens, especially pregnant and parenting teens. Provide pathways to a high school diploma that work for parenting teens, school-to-career options, and realistic, affordable post-secondary educational opportunities that give young people a vision for their future and provide real economic opportunity.
- ◆ Invest in evidence-based home visiting programs that support young parents and their children and improve child development outcomes.

Education

- ◆ Focus on the importance of reading proficiently by the end of third grade. Children who are not proficient in reading by the end of third grade are four times less likely to graduate from high school than proficient readers, profoundly affecting their future earnings.⁶¹
- ◆ Improve access to full-day kindergarten programs for all children and families. Participation in full-day, high-quality kindergarten can help close achievement gaps between the highest and lowest performing students in both reading and math.⁶² In the 2014-2015 school year, 81% of Rhode Island kindergartners were in a full-day program.⁶³
- ◆ Improve high school graduation rates by using data to identify students at-risk of dropping out and providing individualized academic and social supports, improving school climate, creating eighth to ninth grade transition programs, supporting personalized learning and meaningful student connections with adults in school, and implementing rigorous, engaging, and relevant curricula.⁶⁴
- ◆ Provide academic, financial and social supports for low-income, minority and first-generation college students to help increase college enrollment and completion rates.^{65,66}
- ◆ Help families get an early start at saving for their children's higher education by implementing the CollegeBound*baby* Program.

Adult Education and Jobs

- ◆ An estimated 150,000 Rhode Island working-age adults (ages 16 and older) are not enrolled in school and have no high school diploma or have limited English-language skills. Many face both of these obstacles to success in the labor market.⁶⁷
- ◆ Increase investments in GED attainment programs, literacy and English-language programs, and workforce training, key strategies for improving the economic security of low-income parents.

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