CHILD POVERTY IN RHODE ISLAND

Children who grow up in poverty are more likely than other children to have poor health, experience delays in learning and development, become teen parents, and earn less as adults.\textsuperscript{1,2,3} Reducing child poverty requires that government and community leaders develop strategies to improve the financial security of low-income families. In addition, policies that address education, health, and developmental needs of children and support families have been shown to improve outcomes for children living in poverty.

The child poverty rate in Rhode Island increased between 1990 and 2000 while the national rate declined. In 2000, 16.5\% of all children in Rhode Island were living in poverty (40,117 children) compared with 13.5\% in 1990. This represents an increase of more than 10,000 poor children over the past decade. While Rhode Island’s child poverty rate is nearly the same as the national average, Rhode Island has the highest child poverty rate among New England states.\textsuperscript{4}

Addressing child poverty in Rhode Island requires a multi-faceted approach that builds on existing family supports while recognizing new demographic and economic challenges.

- Rhode Island continues to lead the nation in providing low-income families with access to affordable child care and health insurance. High-quality child care and health care are known to mitigate the negative effects of poverty on children.

- A changing economy and the increasing diversity of Rhode Island require increased investments that attract high-wage jobs, provide higher wages for low-skilled workers, improve the education levels of the workforce, and provide access to job training, literacy programs, and English language acquisition.
Rhode Island’s Poor Children, 2000

The highest rates of childhood poverty in Rhode Island are among families with young children, single-parent families, minority families, and families living in the core cities and core urban neighborhoods. According to Census 2000, there are 40,117 poor children in Rhode Island, 16.5% of all Rhode Island children. In 2002, the federal poverty level for a family of four is $18,100.

- While 14% of all Rhode Island families with children are poor, 19% of families with children under age 5 are poor.
- Of all poor children in Rhode Island, 35% are age 5 and younger, 37% are ages 6 to 11, and 28% are ages 12 to 17.

By Age

By Family Structure

23% Married couple family
7% Male householder, no wife present
70% Female householder, no husband present

n = 40,117

By Race

49% White
14% Black
2% Native American
4% Asian
22% Some other race
8% Two or more races

Note: Hispanic or Latino children can be included in any race category. Of the 40,117 poor children, 15,750 (39%) are of Hispanic origin.

By Residence

75% Core cities*
25% Remainder of state

n = 40,117

*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT defines core cities as those communities in which 15% or more of the children live in families with income below the federal poverty level. Because of increases in child poverty between 1990 and 2000, West Warwick is now a core city – with a child poverty rate of 18%. The other five core cities and their corresponding child poverty rates in 2000 are Providence (40%), Pawtucket (25%), Woonsocket (31%), Newport (24%) and Central Falls (41%).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.
The child poverty rate increased in each of the core cities between 1990 and 2000.

Providence now has the third highest child poverty rate (40%) in the country among cities with 100,000 or more in population.¹¹

For the core cities as a group, the child poverty rate increased from 26% to 33% during the 1990s even as it remained relatively stable at just over 6% in the remainder of the state.
MINORITY CHILDREN

The percentage of minority children in Rhode Island increased from 16% to 27% between 1990 and 2000, with a particularly large increase in the number of Hispanic children. Minority children in Rhode Island are far more likely to be poor than White, non-Hispanic children. The poverty rates for Hispanic and Asian children in Rhode Island significantly exceed the national child poverty rates for these ethnic groups. Sixty-four percent of Rhode Island’s poor children are from minority racial and ethnic groups.

Rhode Island’s total child population grew by 10% between 1990 and 2000 (22,132 additional children) while the White, non-Hispanic child population of the state declined by 5% (nearly 9,000 children).

The growing diversity of Rhode Island’s children is not evenly distributed. Increasingly, minority children are concentrated in core urban communities which also have increasingly high rates of child poverty.

76% of children in Providence and 72% in Central Falls are members of minority groups. In several neighborhoods of Providence, minority children now comprise over 90% of all children. These neighborhoods have some of the highest child poverty rates in the state.

LATINOS IN RHODE ISLAND: A PROFILE

In the last decade, the increase in the Latino population of Rhode Island accounted for all of the state’s population increase.

More than half (57%) of the Latinos in Rhode Island were born in Puerto Rico or are immigrants born in another country. Almost one third (30%) arrived in Rhode Island since 1990.

More than three-quarters of Rhode Island’s Latinos live in Providence, Pawtucket or Central Falls. In Providence, Latinos make up 30% of the population (and have quintupled since 1980); in Central Falls, Latinos make up 48% of the population.

Latinos account for 9% of the population of Rhode Island and 14% of the child population. More than half (56%) of all children in Central Falls and 45% of children in Providence are Latino.

More than one-third (39%) of all Rhode Island children living in poverty are Latino. One in two Latino children in Rhode Island is poor, compared with less than one in three nationally.

### Children in Poverty, 1990 and 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY/TOWN</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
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<td>Core Cities*</td>
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<td>25.7%</td>
<td>30,062</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>30,062</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>757</td>
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<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remainder of State</td>
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<td>6.2%</td>
<td>10,055</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>10,055</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>40,117</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>40,117</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>1,663</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>1,663</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Core cities are Providence, Pawtucket, Woonsocket, Newport, Central Falls, and West Warwick.

Note: Racial/ethnic census data depend on self-identified minority status and include all children except those identified as White, non-Hispanic.

Targeting High-Poverty Neighborhoods

Strategies that focus on neighborhoods with a high concentration of poverty and children with multiple risk factors are critical. Efforts that improve neighborhood conditions, link families to economic opportunities, and provide supportive services to children and families can improve child outcomes, even for the poorest children.\textsuperscript{17}

Children living in Rhode Island's core cities are more likely to live in single-parent families, have parents who have dropped out of high school, and live in families in which no parent has full-time, year-round employment.\textsuperscript{18}

Children whose families face multiple disadvantages are at the greatest risk. The effect of each risk factor is not merely additive: each additional risk factor compounds the likelihood of poor outcomes.\textsuperscript{19}

Note: According to this study by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, a child is at high-risk if they have at least three of the following: child lives in a family with income below the poverty line; child lives in a single-parent family; child lives in a family where no parent has full-time, year-round employment; and child lives with a head of household who is a high school drop out.


Making Connections: Addressing the Needs of Low-Income Neighborhoods

Making Connections, a national initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, seeks to stimulate and support local movements to transform high-risk neighborhoods into environments that support families. Making Connections Providence works to engage residents, civic groups, political leaders, grassroots activists, faith-based organizations, and public and private sector leaders to make long-term changes that improve the quality of life for children and families in South Providence, Elmwood, and the West End.

The premise of Making Connections is that children do well when families do well. Children succeed and families are strong when they live in neighborhoods that connect them to:

- **Economic opportunities** including jobs with adequate wages, affordable child care and health care, and opportunities to build savings and assets.
- **Social networks** including supportive relationships with kin, neighbors, faith communities, and civic groups. These networks provide resources and reduce stress and isolation.
- **Supportive services** such as high-quality child care, high-performing schools and adult education, safe and affordable housing, recreation programs and libraries, and access to prevention and crisis-response services.

INVESTING IN FAMILY ECONOMIC SUCCESS

Rhode Island’s approach to welfare reform has been to invest in low-wage workers through cash assistance, education and training, and access to child care and health care, with the long-term goal of improved economic security for families.²⁰

Rhode Island’s welfare caseload decline has been slower than in other states. However, the caseload declines have continued steadily even as many other states have begun to see caseload increases.²¹

New research suggests that long-term investments in education, training, child care and health insurance are paying off:

- Rhode Island’s job retention rate for welfare recipients is significantly above the national rate. For FY 2000, the Rhode Island Department of Human Services won a USDHHS high performance bonus of $4.8 million for having a top 10 ranking in improvement in job entry and success in the workforce.²²,²³,²⁴

- Almost half (46%) of Rhode Island FIP recipients who leave the program have income above the poverty level (as compared with 39% in a national sample) and more of them are employed.²⁵

- The hourly wages of former FIP recipients compare favorably to those of welfare leavers nationally and wages are higher for those who have completed education and training than for those who have not.²⁶

### TWO MEASURES OF FAMILY FINANCES:
**THE FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL AND THE RHODE ISLAND STANDARD OF NEED**

The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is an underestimate of the number of families with children in Rhode Island who are unable to meet their basic needs for food, shelter and other necessities. The FPL does not take into consideration the costs of work expenses such as child care and transportation, nor does it consider rising housing costs. On the other hand, the FPL also fails to consider the cash value of child care subsidies and health insurance. Rhode Island’s policy of providing health care and child care to low-income working families helps to stretch family income and improve child outcomes.

The Rhode Island Standard of Need, a measure calculated annually by the Poverty Institute at the RI College School of Social Work, considers multiple factors, including the costs of housing, child care and health care as well as the cash value of tax credits and income support programs (e.g., Food Stamps, child care subsidies, Rite Care). A single parent with two young children who earns $10.55 an hour (150% FPL or $14,630/year) is able to make ends meet, primarily due to child care and health care subsidies. If the family earns more than 225% FPL ($32,918/year), they become ineligible for the child care subsidy and expenses begin to exceed income.

IMPROVING PARENTAL EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Reducing child poverty increasingly depends on improving the educational attainment of parents. Economic globalization, the decline of well-paid manufacturing jobs and the increase in low-paid service sector employment contribute to an erosion of wages for workers without a college education. The three fastest growing jobs in Rhode Island (retail salespersons, cashiers, nursing aides/orderlies) pay an annual wage close to or below the federal poverty level for a family of four.

In the core cities, 14% of adults over age 25 have less than a ninth grade education. This increases to one in four (24%) adults in Central Falls.

Increased education results in increased income across all racial/ethnic groups. In the United States, the median income of individuals with a bachelor’s degree is nearly three times the median income of a worker without a high school education.

Increasing the availability of quality adult education, literacy and English language programs in Rhode Island would enable many low-wage workers to advance to more-skilled employment at higher wages.

Adult basic education improves literacy for adults without a high school diploma, for immigrants who have limited English skills and for high school graduates who lack skills needed for the new economy.

High-quality adult education and improved access to higher education can reduce poverty rates by developing skills and competencies leading to higher-wage employment.

Demand for Adult Literacy and English as a Second Language Services, Rhode Island, 2001

- Among New England states, Rhode Island has the highest percentage of residents below basic literacy standards. There are an estimated 368,000 people who need adult literacy and ESL services in the state.
- The estimated demand for adult literacy and ESL services in Rhode Island is 73,600 people. The adult basic education system is only able to meet 8% of demand (5,592 clients).

Given the link between educational attainment and family economic status, schools have a critical role in preparing children and youth for employment in a high-skills economy. In Rhode Island, the low performance of schools and high dropout rates in the communities where poverty is highest threaten to perpetuate poverty for the next generation.

An additional challenge for low-income communities is the 56% increase between 1990 and 2000 in the number of children receiving English as a Second Language services or Bilingual Education services. The number of children receiving these services increased from 6,494 students in 1990-1991 to 10,154 students in 2000-2001. The core cities account for 91% of this increase.30

Only 4% of schools in the core cities were high performing and 91% were low performing. However, almost half (41%) of core city schools demonstrated improvement between the 1998-1999 and 2000-2001 school years.

Note: High performing schools are those in which at least 50% of students achieved the state’s math and reading standards; low performing schools are those in which 33% or more of students performed significantly below standards or did not score.

Core Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Falls</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Warwick</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woonsocket</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Highest Income Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barrington</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Greenwich</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exeter-West Greenwich</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scituate</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Kingstown</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The increased diversity and higher poverty rates among children in Rhode Island require policy approaches that build on the state’s achievements and make the well-being of children and their families a priority. Comprehensive strategies are needed to address the needs of a changing and growing population and a high-skills economy. Specifically:

HEALTH CARE
Maintain Rhode Island’s accomplishment of being best in the nation in providing health care coverage to children.

Retain current Rite Care eligibility standards for children, parents, and pregnant women.

Monitor and reassess premium increases in light of evidence that many families cannot afford the premiums and are losing Rite Care coverage as a result.

CHILD CARE
Continue the state’s commitment to child care by maintaining the guarantee of child care assistance to all eligible families (up to 225% of poverty). Affordable, quality child care makes work possible for low-income families and provides children with developmental opportunities that enhance school readiness and mitigate the effects of poverty.

FAMILY INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM
Maintain and increase Rhode Island’s commitment to family economic security through education, training, and family supports for FIP recipients. Emerging evidence indicates that this approach improves employment rates, job retention, and income and therefore holds out the promise of reduced child poverty rates.

Develop additional comprehensive supports for families with multiple barriers to self-sufficiency. There is evidence in Rhode Island and nationally that families still receiving cash assistance generally have more serious barriers to employment than those who have left assistance.31, 32

HOUSING
Maintain and expand on Rhode Island’s initial investment of $10 million for affordable housing.

Increase funding of the Neighborhood Opportunity Program in order to develop additional affordable housing.

Increase the availability of low-income and affordable housing in every Rhode Island community.

JOBS AND INCOME
Ensure that reducing child poverty, which increasingly occurs despite family work participation, is a public policy priority.

Invest in economic development efforts that retain middle-income jobs and increase the availability of high-wage jobs.

Increase wages for workers at the low-end of the labor market so that they have earnings that meet family needs (e.g., increased minimum wage, living wage requirements).

Change tax policies to increase the real earnings of low-income families, including making the Earned Income Tax Credit refundable in Rhode Island.

Ensure that eligible families enroll in income support programs such as Food Stamps, child care subsidies and Rite Care.

ADULT EDUCATION, LITERACY AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL)
Ensure adequate access to high quality adult education, adult literacy, and English as a Second Language programs through increased state investments that improve the capacity and quality of the system.

Integrate literacy and ESL training with job skills training to promote entry into the workforce as well as advancement and wage improvement.
EDUCATION

Improve educational opportunities for poor children, thereby improving their future job opportunities.

Invest in schools and youth programming in low-income neighborhoods to ensure rapid improvements in school performance and improved high school graduation rates in these areas.

Improve access to full-day kindergarten programs for all children and families.

Encourage the development of small schools for low-income and minority children in urban areas.

Invest in comprehensive early education programs for young children and families, including Early Head Start and Comprehensive Child Care Networks.

FOCUS ON THE CORE CITIES

Rhode Island has many children and families that would benefit from sustained investments in comprehensive family support programs that address the multiple needs of all family members, especially in the lowest-income neighborhoods of the core cities.

SELECTED RESOURCES:
COMPREHENSIVE FAMILY SUPPORT AND NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED PROGRAMS

Central Falls Family Support Center

South Providence Family Support Center

Children’s Friend and Service
Lenette Azzi-Lessing, Executive Director
401-331-2900

John Hope Settlement House

Family Renewal Center
Richmond Flowers, Clinical Supervisor
401-455-2330

Making Connections Providence
Shannah Kurland, Site Coordinator
401-781-3669, ext. 255

Connecting for Children and Families, Woonsocket
Terese Curtin, Executive Director
401-766-3384

Sullivan School Family Center, Newport
Christine Arouth, Director
401-845-8579

Cunningham/Slater COZ Family Center, Pawtucket
Mary Parella, Coordinator
401-729-6293

RESOURCES

The Poverty Institute,
Rhode Island College
School of Social Work
Nancy Gewirtz, Ph.D., Director
401-456-8239

Linda Katz, Policy Director
401-456-4634

Campaign to Eliminate Childhood Poverty, George Wiley Center
William Flynn, Coordinator
401-728-5555

Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA)
Luisa Murillo, Executive Director
401-467-0111

Progreso Latino
Edwin Cancel, Executive Director
401-728-5920

Urban League of Rhode Island
Dennis Langley, Executive Director
401-351-5000

Rhode Island Community Action Association (RICAA)
Edward L. Canner, Executive Director
401-467-9610, ext. 162

Rhode Island Community Food Bank
Bernie Beaudreau, Executive Director
401-826-3073

Dorcas Place Parent Literacy Center
Brenda Dann-Messier, Executive Director
401-273-8866

The Housing Network
Brenda Clement, Executive Director
401-521-1461

The Rhode Island Department of Human Services
Health Care/Medicaid
John Young, Associate Director
401-462-3575

Child Care
Reeva Sullivan Murphy
Child Care Administrator
401-462-6875

Family Independence Program
Sherry Campanelli,
Associate Director
401-462-2423
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a children’s policy organization that provides information on child well-being, stimulates dialogue on children’s issues, and promotes accountability and action. Primary funding for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is provided by The Rhode Island Foundation and The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Additional funding is provided by Prince Charitable Trusts, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, CVS/pharmacy, Ocean State Charities Trust, Hasbro Charitable Trust and other corporate, foundation and individual sponsors.

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Against the Tide: Welfare Reform in RI. Providence, RI: Brown University, A. Alfred Taubman Center.

Caseloads Up in Most States Between September and December, 2001 (March 2002). Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.


Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2000-2001 School Year.


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