



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Budget and Legislative Highlights: 2017 Legislative Session

Current as of August 2017.



More information will be contained in the full Rhode Island KIDS COUNT 2017 Legislative Wrap-Up, which will be published following the special legislative session that is planned for September 19, 2017.

Early Learning & Development

- **Evidence-Based Home Visiting:** The *Rhode Island Family Home Visiting Act* was amended to require the RI Department of Health to produce an annual estimate of the number of children born to Rhode Island families who face significant risk factors known to impair child development as well as a funding plan to gradually expand evidence-based home visiting programs to serve all vulnerable families.
- **Child Care Assistance Program:**
 - The Child Care Transition Program (cliff effect policy) was made permanent. Established as a pilot program in 2013, this policy allows low-income families receiving a child care subsidy to retain eligibility as family income grows above 180% FPL (\$36,756) up to 225% FPL (\$45,945). Family co-payments for child care increase as income increases.
 - Tiered Child Care Quality Rates were not established. Although Governor Raimondo had included \$1 million in her proposed FY18 budget to create enhanced reimbursement rates that promote and incentivize quality improvement for child care programs serving infants and toddlers, funding was not included in the final budget. Legislation that would have expanded on the governor's proposal by establishing tiered quality rates for all age groups in the Child Care Assistance Program also did not pass.
- **State Pre-K:** The FY18 budget includes a \$1.1 million increase for the Rhode Island State Pre-K program bringing the total state funding to \$6.2 million. Combined with \$6 million in federal funds, the State Pre-K program will provide high-quality early education to 1,080 four-year-olds in 2017-2018.
- **Head Start:** The FY18 budget includes a \$390,000 increase to support Head Start, bringing the total state funding for Head Start to \$1.2 million to provide high-quality early education to 130 low-income three- and four-year olds in addition to the 2,000 who are served through federal funding.

- **Kindergarten Entry Profile:** Funding to implement a kindergarten entry profile was not included in the FY18 budget.
- **Early Childhood Innovation Act:** The Rhode Island Early Childhood Innovation Act did not pass. The bill would have established a competitive grant program overseen by the Rhode Island Department of Education to support innovative and effective early childhood models for infants and toddlers.

Economic Well-Being

- **Minimum Wage:** The General Assembly approved an incremental increase in the minimum wage over two years from \$9.60 per hour to \$10.10 per hour, effective January 1, 2018 and to \$10.50 per hour, effective January 1, 2019.
- **Incarcerated Parents:** The FY 18 budget includes \$300,000 to fund a Pay for Success program within the Department of Corrections designed to increase employment and reduce recidivism among formerly incarcerated individuals.
- **Child Support:** Legislation passed that allows the Office of Child Support Services to automatically file a motion to modify or a motion for relief when a noncustodial parent is or will be incarcerated for 180 days or more. The Family Court must consider the noncustodial parent's ability to pay child support (e.g., assets, financial resources, benefits and length of sentence) and modify or suspend the child support order as appropriate. This bill also clarifies that incarceration may not be considered by the court as "voluntary unemployment."
- **Unified Health Infrastructure Project (UHIP):** The FY 18 budget includes \$21.1 million in federal, general revenue, and Information Technology Investment funds for UHIP, the state's integrated benefits eligibility system for public assistance. The budget also adds 143.0 FTE positions related to the UHIP project, including 60.0 permanent positions and 83.0 temporary positions.

Education

- **Education Funding Formula:** The seventh year of the education funding formula was fully funded for FY 18, with an additional \$46.0 million over FY 2017. Funding includes an additional \$1.1 million for the State Pre-K program, \$460,000 to regional districts to transport students within district, \$900,000 in density aid to the seven communities that have more than 5% of their students attending schools of choice, including charter schools, Davies, and the MET, \$6.8 million for Central Falls stabilization, \$3.2 million for Davies stabilization, \$800,000 for MET School stabilization, and \$4.1 million for group home aid to districts hosting group homes.
- **English Language Learners:** Article 18 of the FY 18 budget makes permanent the English Language Learner (ELL) categorical fund in the state's education funding formula which passed as

a pilot last year and provides \$2.5 million in categorical funds to local districts to support evidence-based ELL programs during FY 18.

- **Special Education:** Article 12 of the FY 18 budget requires the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) to collect data on high-cost special education, including costs that exceed two and three times the core foundation amount, as well as four times as was previously required.
- **Transportation:** Article 12 also amends the transportation categorical fund to separate out aid for costs associated with transporting students to out-of-district non-public schools and for costs associated with transporting students within regional school districts.
- **School Construction Aid:** The FY 18 budget includes \$80 million (consistent with the FY 2017 allocation) to fund the projected cost of school construction aid to local districts, including \$70.9 million for school housing aid and \$9.1 million for the School Building Authority Capital Fund that was established last year.
- **SAT/PSAT:** The FY 18 budget includes \$500,000 in general revenues to continue to support Governor Raimondo's initiative to allow all students in public high schools to take the PSAT and SAT during the school day at no cost.
- **Advanced Coursework Network:** The FY 18 budget includes \$550,000 (\$300,000 from permanent school funds and \$250,000 from general revenue) to support the Advanced Coursework Network, a program that helps middle and high school students access personalized, advanced coursework opportunities that may not be available at their school.
- **Dual Enrollment:** The FY 18 budget includes \$1.3 million to continue funding Prepare RI, a dual enrollment initiative that allows qualifying students to earn credit at their high school and at state public higher education institutions, at no cost to students or families. Article 18 of the FY 18 budget limits payments to the public higher education institutions for dual and concurrent enrollment to the amount appropriated and requires the Council on Postsecondary Education to develop rules and regulations for enforcing this limit.
- **P-TECH:** The FY 18 budget eliminates funding for the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) program, which supports partnerships among high schools, colleges, and businesses and allows students to get both high school diplomas and associate's degrees in five or six years while participating in mentorships and internships that will prepare them for employment. This program currently operates in Newport, North Providence, Providence, Westerly, and Woonsocket.
- **Computer Science Education:** The FY 18 budget includes \$210,000 to support the Governor's initiative to provide computer science education in every public school.
- **Virtual Education:** Legislation passed that allows school districts to submit virtual education policies to the Rhode Island Department of Education describing how they will conduct virtual education when schools are closed due to weather or other emergencies.
- **Child Opportunity Zones:** Legislation passed that defines the purpose of Child Opportunity Zones (COZs), Rhode Island's community school initiative, and requires that the Rhode Island

Department of Education submit an annual report to the General Assembly that includes the number of children and families served by each COZ and the outcomes they achieve.

- **Data Collection and Reporting:** Legislation passed that requires the Rhode Island Department of Education to collect and report on specific Asian ethnic subgroups in reports it produces on educational achievement, attendance, access to educational resources, and graduation rates. Where there are fewer than 10 students, data can be suppressed for confidentiality but should be noted.
- **Substance Abuse Education and Suicide Prevention:** Legislation passed that asks the Rhode Island Department of Education to consider incorporating substance abuse education and suicide prevention into the health education curriculum after consulting with the Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals.
- **Media Literacy:** Legislation passed that asks the Rhode Island Department of Education to consider incorporating media literacy into the state's Basic Education Plan.
- **Children with Disabilities:** Legislation passed that requires a student's school district to continue paying for post-secondary and transitional education programs students are already enrolled in at age 21 through the conclusion of the program or academic year.
- **RI Promise Scholarship:** Article 3 of the FY 18 budget creates the RI Promise Scholarship program which covers the cost of two years of tuition and mandatory fees at the Community College of Rhode Island for qualifying Rhode Island students, after federal and other financial aid funds available are used. Qualifying students must have completed their high school diploma or equivalency before reaching age 19 and have completed the FAFSA. Students must enroll the fall after graduating from high school and must enroll full-time. Recipients must maintain a 2.5 grade point average or better and commit to staying in Rhode Island after graduation to live, work, or continue their education. The program will be implemented for four cohorts of students, beginning in the fall of 2017. An evaluation of the program will be conducted once the second cohort completes two years of college. For FY 18, this program provides \$2.8 million for scholarships at CCRI.
- **Higher Education Funding:** The FY 18 budget included tuition increases of 7.0% for in-state tuition and 4.0% for out-of-state tuition at the University of Rhode Island, 6.9% for in-state tuition and 5.0% for out-of-state tuition at Rhode Island College, and 7.0% for students at the Community College of Rhode Island.
- **RI Wavemaker Fund:** The FY 18 budget reduces by \$800,000 funding to support the RI Wavemaker Fund, a competitive student loan reimbursement program for college and university graduates working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.

Safety

- **DCYF Budget:** The FY 18 budget reflects \$7.4 million dollars less than FY 17 final budget and shifts 12.0 FTE positions from the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families

(DCYF) to the Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS).

- **OCA Budget:** The FY 18 budget adds 1.0 FTE position to the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) for a Case Management Coordinator.
- **Criminal Injuries Compensation:** Legislation passed that allows for compensation for a minor who witnesses a homicide or incident of domestic violence from the Crime Victims Compensation Program.
- **Domestic Abuse Prevention:** Legislation passed which adds the definition of "sexual exploitation" in the domestic abuse prevention law to include acts by any person who knowingly or willfully encourages, aids or coerces any child under the age of eighteen years to engage in commercial sex acts.
- **Child Restraint Systems:** Legislation passed that requires infants and toddlers under two years of age or weighing less than thirty pounds be restrained in rear-facing car seats.

Health

- **Rlte Care:** The FY 18 budget preserves current Rlte Care eligibility and benefits. It also increases the Children's Health Account assessment charged to commercial insurers for services provided to children with special health care needs from \$7,500 to \$12,500 per child, as proposed by the Governor. The Budget also enacts enhanced federal claiming for the managed care performance goal program and specific populations, including pregnant women, children, and youth age 18 to 21. Proposals to reform oral surgery payments or create a pediatric home asthma response program were not included as they were withdrawn by the Governor.
- **Lead Poisoning:** The FY 18 budget does not include Article 22 as proposed by the Governor, which would have centralized lead poisoning prevention and funding under the RI Department of Health, mandated lead inspections for pre-1978 owner-occupied rental properties, and eliminated the lead inspection requirement for foster home licensure.
- **Cigarette Tax:** The FY 18 budget increases the cigarette tax by \$0.50, from \$3.75 to \$4.25 per pack. It does not allocate \$500,000 of those increased funds for tobacco prevention and cessation or \$2.5 million for an Outdoor Recreation Investment fund, as proposed by the Governor.
- **Conversion Therapy:** Legislation passed that prohibits licensed health care providers from practicing conversion therapy relating to sexual orientation and/or gender identity for children and youth under age eighteen.
- **Mental Health:** The Senate passed a resolution encouraging the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to examine policies and make recommendations on improving the quality of mental health services, including those relating to maternal depression and early childhood mental health.

- **ACA Health Insurance:** The Senate passed a resolution that established a Senate Special Commission to assess and make recommendation about health insurance issues relating to consumer protection, choice, affordability, quality, and market stability.

Fiscal Year 2018 Budget

The Rhode Island General Assembly enacted a FY 18 budget in the amount of \$9.2 billion. The budget consists of \$3.8 billion in state general revenue, \$3.1 billion in federal funds, \$261.7 million in restricted receipts, and \$2.1 billion in other funds. The budget includes an unspecified statewide savings of \$25.0 million in general revenue to be distributed among state agencies.

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