Immigrant families in Rhode Island are diverse in terms of country of origin, socio-economic status, education level and language skills. Immigrant families contribute to the state and the nation through payment of property, sales and income taxes, cultural contributions and small business ownership. Understanding the needs of children in immigrant families can help policymakers and community leaders ensure that all children grow up with the opportunities they need to succeed.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2010, 24% (54,000) of Rhode Island children were living in immigrant families, comparable to the U.S. rate of 23%. Children in immigrant families are defined as children under age 18 who are foreign-born or who have at least one foreign-born parent, regardless of citizenship status or year of arrival in the United States.

According to the Population Reference Bureau, of the 54,000 Rhode Island children in immigrant families in 2010, 98% had parents who had been living in the United States for more than five years. Eighty-nine percent of children in immigrant families in Rhode Island are U.S. citizens. Among children ages 5 to 17 in Rhode Island who live in immigrant families that speak another language at home, more than nine out of ten of them speak English "well" or "very well."
**IMMIGRATION IN RHODE ISLAND**

- Immigration is not a new phenomenon in the United States or in Rhode Island. The U.S. Census Bureau began collecting data on nativity of residents in 1850, when foreign-born residents (children and adults) made up 10% of the total U.S. population. Between 1860 and 1920, the foreign-born population in the U.S. fluctuated between 13% and 15%, declining to 7% by 1950.

- In 1900 in Rhode Island, 31% of the population was foreign-born, declining to 14% by 1950. Since 1970, when 8% of Rhode Island residents were foreign-born, the percentage of foreign-born Rhode Island residents has grown each decade.6,7

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 134,335 foreign-born residents (children and adults) living in Rhode Island in 2010, making up 12.8% of Rhode Island's population, just below the U.S. rate of 12.9%.8

- Rhode Island’s ranking among the 50 states based on the percentage of the population that is foreign-born has fallen from 7th in 1990 to 11th in 2000 and 14th in 2010.9

- Of the 134,335 foreign-born residents living in Rhode Island in 2010, 63,883 (48%) were citizens and 70,452 (52%) were non-citizens. Non-citizen foreign-born residents made up 7% of Rhode Island’s total population in 2010.10

- Most non-citizens are in the U.S. legally, including legal permanent residents, refugees, asylees and people with student visas and work visas. Nationally, it is estimated that less than a third (28%) of foreign-born residents are unauthorized (undocumented).11

- According to the Pew Research Center, in 2010, there were an estimated 25,000 to 35,000 unauthorized immigrants in Rhode Island, making up approximately 2.4% - 3.3% of the state’s population.12,13

**NATIONAL IMMIGRATION TRENDS**

- Since the beginning of the recession, the pace of immigration to the United States has slowed considerably.14 For example, according to the Pew Research Center, between 2005 and 2010, net migration (the difference between those immigrating to and emigrating from the United States) from Mexico to the United States fell to zero. During this period, as many people moved from Mexico to the United States as moved from the United States to Mexico. A weakened U.S. job market, improved economic conditions in Mexico, increased border enforcement, a rise in deportations and a decrease in Mexico’s birth rates have contributed to this decline.15

- Nationally, the number of immigrants from Asia has surpassed the number of newly arrived Hispanic immigrants. Approximately 36% of new immigrants to the United States in 2010 were Asian, compared with 31% who were Hispanic.16
FOREIGN-BORN CHILDREN IN RHODE ISLAND

Between 2008 and 2010, 3% (7,938) of Rhode Island’s children under age 18 were foreign-born. Foreign-born children made up 15% of Rhode Island’s children living in immigrant families.17

REGIONS OF BIRTH, FOREIGN-BORN CHILDREN, RHODE ISLAND, 2008-2010

- 24% Caribbean
- 22% Central America
- 19% Africa
- 16% Asia
- 10% South America
- 6% Europe
- 3% Canada, Mexico or Bermuda


Of foreign-born children living in Rhode Island between 2008 and 2010, 24% were born in the Caribbean, 22% were born in Central America, 19% were born in Africa, 16% were born in Asia, 10% were born in South America, 6% were born in Europe, and 3% were born in Canada, Bermuda or Mexico.18 Children born in Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens and are not counted as foreign-born.

CATEGORIES OF FOREIGN-BORN PEOPLE IN THE U.S.

- Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs) are persons who have been granted permission to live and work permanently in the United States. They also are known as “green card” recipients. LPRs may apply for citizenship after five years.

- Refugees and asylees and other "humanitarian" immigrants are persons who sought residence in the United States in order to avoid persecution in their country of origin. Persons granted refugee status applied for admission while outside the United States. Persons granted asylum applied either at a port of entry or at some point after their entry into the United States. Refugees and asylees may apply to adjust their status to LPR after one year.

- Naturalized citizens refer to persons aged 18 and over who become citizens of the United States. Most legal permanent residents are eligible to apply for naturalization within five years after obtaining LPR status. Immigrant children generally become citizens automatically when their parents become citizens.

- Non-immigrant admissions refer to arrivals of persons who are authorized to stay in the United States for a limited period of time. Most non-immigrants enter the United States as tourists or business travelers, but some come to work, study, or engage in cultural exchange programs.

- Unauthorized immigrants (sometimes referred to as undocumented or illegal immigrants) refer to persons who entered the country without permission or who entered through legal channels but then violated the terms of entry by staying past his or her visa expiration date or by engaging in unauthorized work.

RHODE ISLAND’S CHILDREN IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

While similar to children in U.S.-born families in many ways, including family structure and parental labor force participation, Rhode Island children in immigrant families face distinct educational, economic and health challenges.

BY AGE, 2008-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 5 and Under</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 6 to 11</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 12 to 17</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 54,000

BY PARENTS’ EDUCATION, 2008-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Degree</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Degree or Higher</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 53,000*

BY FAMILY STRUCTURE, 2008-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Structure</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-Parent</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-Parent</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Living with Either Parent</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 54,000

BY CITIZENSHIP STATUS, 2008-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Citizen</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 54,000

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of 2008-2010 American Community Survey data. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

*This denominator is the total number children under age 18 in immigrant families living with at least one parent; other denominators are all children under age 18 in immigrant families.

- Sixty-six percent of Rhode Island children living in immigrant families live in a two-parent household compared with 61% of children in U.S.-born families.19
- Twenty-nine percent of Rhode Island children living in immigrant families are under age six, 34% are between age six and 11 and 36% are between age 12 and 17. This closely mirrors the age distribution of children in U.S.-born families.20
- More than a quarter (26%) of Rhode Island children in immigrant families have at least one resident parent who has a college degree or graduate level education, many of whom work in professional capacities as doctors, teachers, researchers and other professions.21
PARENTAL EDUCATION LEVELS

◆ Parental educational attainment can impact many aspects of child well-being, including health, education and material resources. Lack of education also can put parents at a disadvantage in their attempts to secure a better life for their children. Nationally, 26% of children in immigrant families live in households where neither parent has a high school diploma.

Children in families where all resident parents have less than a high school degree, Rhode Island, 2008-2010


◆ In Rhode Island between 2008 and 2010, 19% of children with immigrant parents lived in families where all resident parents had less than a high school degree, compared to 7% of children with U.S.-born parents.

LANGUAGE ABILITY OF CHILDREN AGES 5 TO 17 IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES, RHODE ISLAND, 2008-2010

Source: Population Reference Bureau Analysis of 2008-2010 American Community Survey Data. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

*Denominator is the total number children in immigrant families ages 5-17 who speak a language other than English at home.

LINGUISTICALLY ISOLATED HOUSEHOLDS

◆ Children living in families where no one over the age of 14 either only speaks English or speaks English “very well” are considered to be linguistically isolated. Linguistic isolation contributes to family economic barriers and impacts parents’ ability to find higher wage employment and communicate effectively with their children’s teachers and health care providers.

◆ Twenty-three percent of children in immigrant families in Rhode Island lived in linguistically isolated households. Adequate access to English-language classes for adults can help to reduce linguistic isolation.
PARENTAL LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

- Virtually all immigrant families with children are working families, with 95% labor force participation. In Rhode Island in 2008, children in immigrant families had higher parental labor force participation rates than children in U.S.-born families.²⁸

**EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF PARENTS BY FAMILY NATIVITY, RHODE ISLAND, 2008**

- Children in U.S.-Born Families
  - No Parent in Labor Force: 9%
  - One of Two Resident Parents in Labor Force: 10%
  - All Available Parents in Labor Force: 73%

- Children in Immigrant Families
  - No Parent in Labor Force: 5%
  - One of Two Resident Parents in Labor Force: 18%
  - All Available Parents in Labor Force: 77%

Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org *Most recent year for which data are available for Rhode Island due to small sample size in years since 2008.

FAMILY INCOME

- Compared to children in U.S.-born families, children in immigrant families are more likely to be poor (incomes below 100% of the federal poverty threshold) or low-income (incomes below 200% of the federal poverty threshold). Nationally, more than half (54%) of all children in immigrant families live in low-income families, compared to 41% of children in U.S.-born families.²⁹

- Children in immigrant families are more likely to live in low-income working families than children in U.S.-born families.³⁰

- Nearly three-quarters (71%) of Rhode Island’s poor children live in families where all parents are U.S.-born.³¹

**CHILDREN LIVING IN LOW-INCOME FAMILIES, RHODE ISLAND, 2008**

- Children in U.S.-Born Families
  - Below the Poverty Threshold: 14%
  - Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Threshold: 17%
  - Above 200% of the Poverty Threshold: 69%

- Children in Immigrant Families
  - Below the Poverty Threshold: 19%
  - Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Threshold: 25%
  - Above 200% of the Poverty Threshold: 56%

Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org *Most recent year for which data are available for Rhode Island due to small sample size in years since 2008.

- In 2008, Rhode Island’s child poverty rate among children in U.S.-born families was 14%, compared with 19% of children living in immigrant families.³² Wages and income vary significantly among immigrants to the United States, with the median hourly wage for Mexican immigrants being less than half that of immigrants from Canada, Australia and Europe.³³
STATE AND FEDERAL PUBLIC BENEFIT PROGRAMS

The federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 restricted the eligibility of lawfully-present immigrant children and adults for Medicaid and children’s health insurance programs. Unauthorized immigrants were never eligible for federal funding through these programs. Emergency medical services are available to all people regardless of immigration status.

After 1996, a number of states, including Rhode Island, created state-funded programs for non-citizen children who met income guidelines. During the 2006 legislative session, eligibility for Rhode Island’s Rite Care health insurance program was eliminated for undocumented and LPR children who were not enrolled in Rite Care prior to January 1, 2007. As of June 1, 2008, approximately 2,800 legal permanent resident children who have lived in the U.S. less than five years and undocumented children who were previously enrolled in Rite Care lost coverage. Federal matching funds for lawfully residing children became available to states as a result of the reauthorization of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in 2009. As of April 1, 2010, lawfully-residing immigrant children, including LPR children, refugees, asylees and several other statuses, are eligible for the Rite Care, Rite Share, and Katie Beckett programs without waiting five years to be eligible. Pregnant immigrant women (regardless of legal status) who meet income guidelines continue to be eligible.

State and federal public benefit programs, such as the Rhode Island Works (RI Works) Program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) provide a safety net for children and work-supports for families. Legal permanent resident children are eligible for SNAP benefits if they meet the other eligibility guidelines. LPR children who meet other program eligibility criteria can receive RI Works benefits after they have had LPR status for five years. Some other lawfully-present children (including refugees and asylees) also are eligible for RI Works and SNAP benefits. Unauthorized immigrants are not eligible for either of these benefits.
ACCESS TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

♦ High-quality early learning opportunities improve the odds that children will succeed in school. Children attending high-quality early care and education programs are less likely to repeat grades, drop out of school, or need special education than children who have not had high-quality early educational experiences. These programs also can connect families to other supports they need and for which they are eligible. Children in immigrant families are less likely to participate in high-quality child care and early education programs than children in U.S.-born families.

♦ Each year large numbers of children, especially low-income and minority children, enter school without the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. Research shows that offering linguistically and culturally competent high-quality early childhood and school readiness programs can improve educational outcomes for cultural and linguistic minority children.

♦ Between 2008 and 2010, 37% of 3- and 4-year-old children in immigrant families in Rhode Island attended child care or preschool as compared with 55% of their U.S.-born peers.

♦ Child care subsidies improve access to quality child care and early educational opportunities for children in low-income working families. Rhode Island children who are citizens, legal permanent residents, refugees and asylees are eligible to receive child care subsidies if their parents meet the income eligibility guidelines and work requirements.

K-12 EDUCATION

♦ Given the link between educational attainment and family economic success, a high-quality education is one of the most important vehicles for upward mobility for children in immigrant families. Efforts that increase high school graduation and college completion rates among immigrant students are critical to young people’s future success in the workforce.

♦ National research shows that children in immigrant families are more likely to be concentrated in under-resourced schools in high poverty communities. In Rhode Island, students in the four core cities with the highest poverty rates (Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence and Woonsocket) consistently have lower reading proficiency, attend lower performing schools and have lower graduation rates than students in the remainder of the state.

U.S. SUPREME COURT DECISION GUARANTEE RIGHT TO PUBLIC EDUCATION

♦ In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Plyler v. Doe that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits states from denying a free public education to undocumented immigrant children regardless of immigration status. The Equal Protection Clause provides that no State shall "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

♦ In its ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court stated, "...Public education has a pivotal role in maintaining the fabric of our society and in sustaining our political and cultural heritage; the deprivation of education takes an inestimable toll on the social, economic, intellectual and psychological well being of the individual, and poses an obstacle to individual achievement. In determining the rationality of the Texas statute, its costs to the Nation and to the innocent children may properly be considered."

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

◆ Strong language skills in multiple languages are an economic asset for individuals as well as communities. In Rhode Island in 2010, 24% of children between the ages of 5 and 17 spoke a language other than English at home.51 Among children in immigrant families, 64% speak a language other than English at home; of these children, nine out of ten (92%) spoke English "well" or "very well."52

◆ Nationally and in Rhode Island, English Language Learner (ELL) students score significantly lower on standardized tests and graduate high school at lower rates than their peers.53,54

◆ Schools play a critical role in identifying students who are not fluent in English and providing them with appropriate academic supports.55 Rhode Island schools are legally mandated to provide programs to ELL students that are comparable in structure and content to instruction provided to English-proficient students.56

◆ During the 2010-2011 school year, there were 8,307 ELL students in Rhode Island public schools. Seventy-five percent of all ELL students in Rhode Island live in the four core cities of Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence and Woonsocket.57 Core cities are the four Rhode Island communities in which the highest percentages of children are living in poverty.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS, BY LANGUAGE, RHODE ISLAND, 2010-2011 SCHOOL YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>6,195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creole/Patois</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Island Languages</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Languages</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes French, Russian, Polish and other languages.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS, BY COMMUNITY, RHODE ISLAND, 2010-2011 SCHOOL YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>4,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Falls</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranston</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woonsocket</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Providence</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter Schools</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remainder of State</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>925</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=8,307

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010-2011 School Year. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

◆ In the 2010-2011 school year, ELL students in Rhode Island public schools spoke 77 different languages; the majority (75%) spoke Spanish. Nineteen percent were enrolled in a bilingual program and 81% were enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Central Falls, Providence and the International Charter School were the only districts to offer bilingual programs in the 2010-2011 school year.58
RECOMMENDATIONS

◆ Increase access to high-quality child care and early education programs for children in families from diverse cultural and language backgrounds. Children in immigrant families are less likely to attend child care or preschool in the two years before kindergarten and are less likely to have the skills needed to be ready to succeed in school.

◆ Ensure that English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education programs in public schools provide high-level academic content and improve English proficiency. Support bilingual programs that simultaneously develop proficiency in English and proficiency in another language. Appropriately transition ELL students to mainstream classrooms with the supports they need to succeed. Provide high-quality teacher preparation and professional development for teachers of ELL students.

◆ Use the new student identifier and the Rhode Island Department of Education data warehouse to track the academic proficiency levels, academic progress and graduation rates of students who are English Language Learners. Use the data to improve academic supports for these students.

◆ Maintain access to in-state tuition for undocumented students who have lived in the state for at least three years, graduated from Rhode Island high schools and been admitted to public colleges and universities. In 2011, the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education approved a measure that grants in-state tuition to undocumented students. Twelve states have passed legislation allowing undocumented students to access in-state tuition rates, based on criteria that include graduating from high school in the state and minimum number of years in residence in the state.59

◆ Increase the availability of high-quality adult basic education and English-language classes, with special attention to communities with waiting lists. According to the Office of Adult Education at the Rhode Island Department of Education, there currently are not enough adult education and ESL services to meet demand.

◆ Improve access to college transition services and financial aid for full-time and part-time adult students, including parents in immigrant families. Higher education, technical training programs and technical colleges enable low-income adults to earn better wages and access career ladders.

◆ Restore access to Rlite Care health insurance for income-eligible children who are undocumented immigrants. All children need access to health care that supports their healthy growth and development and promotes school success. Health insurance coverage increases the likelihood that children will receive needed preventive services and reduces emergency room costs.

◆ Support federal efforts to achieve comprehensive immigration reform. Federal immigration reform is critical to ensure appropriate levels of enforcement while providing unauthorized immigrants with a clear path to obtain legal status. The majority of children in immigrant families are U.S. citizens, even if their parents are not. Establishing an earned path to legal status through federal immigration reform is important for industries that currently rely on undocumented workers as well as for the well-being of children who are affected by workplace raids and the deportation of parents. On June 15, 2012, President Barack Obama’s Administration issued a memorandum stating that undocumented immigrants up to age 30 who came to the United States before the age of 16, have continuously resided in the country for five years, are currently in school, have graduated high school, obtained a GED or served in the military and have not been convicted of a felony offense, significant misdemeanor offenses or otherwise pose a risk to national security or public safety are eligible for a two-year deferral from deportation.60
**NATIONAL RESOURCES ON IMMIGRANT ISSUES**

- U.S. Census Bureau
  www.census.gov
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
  (formerly the Immigration and Naturalization Service)
  www.uscis.gov
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
  www.aecf.org/Home/KnowledgeCenter/SpecialInterestAreas/ImmigrantsRefugees.aspx
- Children in America’s Newcomer Families: An Initiative of the Center for Social & Demographic Analysis at SUNY Albany and Child Trends, Inc.
  www.albany.edu/csda/children
- The Future of Children Journal: Immigrant Children
  www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/journals/
- Migration Policy Institute
  www.migrationpolicy.org
- National Council of La Raza
  www.nclr.org
- National Immigration Law Center
  www.nilc.org
- Pew Hispanic Center
  www.pewhispanic.org

**RHODE ISLAND RESOURCES ON IMMIGRANT ISSUES**

- Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA)
  Doris Blanchard, Program Director
  (401) 467-0111, www.chispari.org
- Dorcas Place Adult and Family Learning Center
  Carol Holmquist, President/CEO
  (401) 273-8866, www.dorcasplace.org
- English for Action
  (401) 421-3181, www.englishforaction.org
- Genesis Center
  Pheamo R. Witcher, President/CEO
  (401) 781-6110, www.gencenter.org
- International Institute Rhode Island
  William Shuey, Executive Director
  (401) 461-5940, www.iiri.org
- Progreso Latino
  Mario Bueno, Executive Director
  (401) 728-5920, www.progresolatino.org
- Project Hope/Proyecto Esperanza
  (401) 728-0515, www.dioceseofprovidence.org
- Socio Economic Development Center for Southeast Asians (SEDC-SEA)
  Channavy Chhay, Executive Director
  (401) 274-8811, www.sedcsea.org

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

REFERENCES


The Future of Children, 14(2), 3-17.


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.

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Staff
Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director
Jill Beckwith, Deputy Director
Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst
Dorene Bloomer, Finance Director
Jennifer Capaldo, Administrative Assistant
W. Galerza, Executive Assistant/Office Manager
Stephanie Geller, Policy Analyst
Amy Lanchot, Communications Coordinator
John Neubauer, Policy Analyst
Joyce Nguyen, Intern, Brown University

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903
401-351-9400
401-351-1758 (fax)
rikids@rikidscount.org
www.rikidscount.org

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