



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
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**Testimony Re: Budget Article 22, Section 3 on Medical Assistance and
Public Assistance Caseload Estimating Conferences
Senate Finance Committee
February 25, 2016
Stephanie Geller, Senior Policy Analyst**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its concerns about Budget Article 22, Section 3, specifically the proposal to no longer forecast “public assistance” caseloads and to focus the Caseload Estimating Conference exclusively on medical assistance.

In 1991, the General Assembly created a Medical Assistance and Public Assistance Caseload Estimating Conference that was similar to the Revenue Estimating Conference but focused on adopting caseload estimates for public assistance programs. Historically, these programs have included four programs -- the Rhode Island Works cash assistance program, the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Supplemental Security Income, and General Public Assistance.

As you know, generally speaking, the Governor uses the estimates that come out of the November Caseload Estimating Conference to develop her or his budget, and the General Assembly uses the estimates from the May Caseload Estimating Conference to develop its own budget. This process provides transparency (hearings open to the public and reports posted on the General Assembly’s website), accurate forecasting (done semi-annually), and consensus (includes both the Governor and the General Assembly).

We understand that the reason for this proposal is the declining general revenue appropriated to public assistance programs. However, we continue to see value in including public assistance in the Caseload Estimating Conference. First, doing so allows for discussion of key economic forecasting data and policy changes that will likely result in increases or decreases in the caseloads. Second, doing so allows for a thorough discussion of how federal TANF funds (about \$100M) are being spent.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has called attention to the declining general revenue allocated to RI Works (no general revenue since Fiscal Year 2010) and very limited general revenue for the Child Care Assistance Program, a key work supports program for which 82% of subsidies go to low-income working families not receiving cash assistance, 10% to families enrolled in RI Works and participating in employment activities, and 9% to children in the care of the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF).

We would encourage this Committee to carefully consider the value of continuing to include public assistance programs, particularly the RI Works and Child Care Assistance Program in Caseload Estimating Conferences.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.