

Children in Families Receiving Cash Assistance

DEFINITION

Children in families receiving cash assistance is the percentage of children under age 18 who were living in families receiving cash assistance through the Rhode Island Works Program (RI Works), the program that replaced the Family Independence Program (FIP). These data measure the number of children and families enrolled in RI Works on December 1, 2008. Children and families who participated in the program at other points in the year but who were not enrolled on December 1, 2008 are not included.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Rhode Island Works Program (RI Works) replaced the Family Independence Program (FIP), effective July 1, 2008. The goal of RI Works is to help families successfully transition to work by providing cash assistance and work supports, including employment services, food stamp benefits, health insurance and subsidized child care.¹ Children and families qualify for cash assistance based on their income, resources and the number of people in their families.²

RI Works cash assistance recipients must participate in an employment plan focused on supporting rapid entrance or re-entrance into the workforce, unless they meet specific

criteria for a work exemption.

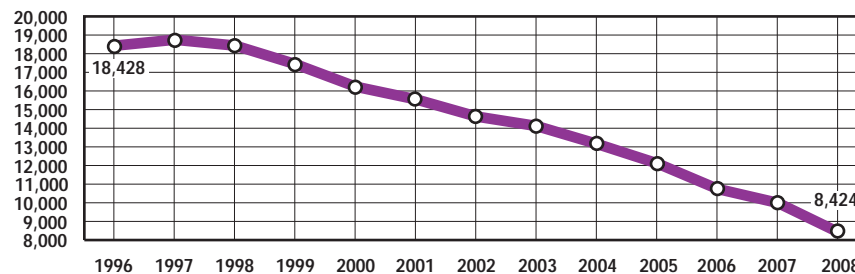
Employment plans may include job search and placement, job skills development, work experience, literacy and GED programs, vocational education, English-language programs or post-secondary education.³

RI Works provides a safety net for children whose parents are unable to work due to a disability and functions as an unemployment system for parents who do not have sufficient earnings or work experience to qualify for regular unemployment benefits. RI Works also provides time-limited supplementary cash assistance to very low-income working families.⁴ In December 2008, the average wage of parents enrolled in RI Works and working was \$9.12 per hour.⁵

RI Works also connects families to the Office of Child Support Services (OCSS), which assists families in establishing paternity (when applicable), establishing child support orders and collecting money from non-custodial parents. In Rhode Island, the first \$50 of child support paid on time each month on behalf of a child enrolled in RI Works goes to the custodial parent caring for the child.⁶

The maximum monthly RI Works benefit for a family of three is \$554 per month.⁷ Rhode Island's monthly benefit has not increased in 18 years.⁸

Cash Assistance* Caseload, Rhode Island, 1996 – 2008



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, December 1, 1996 – 2008. Cases can be child-only or whole families and multiple people can be included in one case. *The Rhode Island cash assistance program was called Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) until May 1, 1997, then called the Family Independence Program (FIP) until July 1, 2008, when it became the Rhode Island Works Program (RI Works).

◆ **Between 1996 and 2008, the Rhode Island cash assistance caseload decreased by 54% from 18,428 to 8,424. In just the past year, from 2007 to 2008, the caseload decreased by 16% or 1,569 cases.**^{9,10,11}

◆ **A large part of the recent decline was the result of new policies that eliminated children's entitlement to cash assistance when parents reach their time limit. In 2008, there were 1,301 fewer child-only cases than in 2007. In fact, 83% of the overall decline in the caseload from 2007 and 2008 can be attributed to reductions in child-only cases.**^{12,13}

◆ **In December 2008, there were 6,307 adults and 13,973 children under age 18 enrolled in RI Works. Almost seven out of ten (69%) of all RI Works beneficiaries were children, and almost half (49%) of the children enrolled in RI Works were under the age of six. In Rhode Island, 83% of the families enrolled in RI Works have one or two children.**¹⁴

◆ **In December 2008, there were 625 teen heads of household enrolled in RI Works, representing 7% of the total caseload.¹⁵ Teen parents without a high school diploma receive mandatory parenting skills training and are supported in completing their high school education while enrolled in RI Works. Teen parents are required to live in an adult-supervised setting if such an arrangement is available and appropriate.**¹⁶

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RI Works Policies

Work Requirements

◆ **Single-parent families must participate in a work activity for a minimum of 20 hours per week if they have a child under age six and a minimum of 30 hours per week if their youngest child is age six or older. Single parents can combine 10 hours of job skills training or education that is directly related to employment or a GED program with 20 hours of work to reach the 30-hour work requirement.**¹⁷

Time Limits

◆ **The lifetime limit for RI Works is 48 months, rather than 60 months as it was under FIP. Families also are now limited to no more than 24 months of cash assistance in a 60-month period. All cash assistance issued in Rhode Island or any other state since May 1997 counts toward a family's time limits. The Rhode Island Department of Human Services also has the discretion to offer hardship exemptions to the time limits for families in certain situations (such as domestic violence and homelessness).**¹⁸

Child-Only Cases

◆ **Child-only cases are those that receive assistance for only the children in the family because the child's parent is ineligible. Child-only cases include children living with a non-parent relative or a parent who is disabled and receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Children living with parents who have reached their time limits are no longer entitled to cash assistance as child-only cases as they were under FIP.**¹⁹

Citizenship/Residency

◆ **Recipients of cash assistance must be United States citizens, legal residents who have been in the U.S. for at least five years, or be exempt from the five-year ban on receipt of cash assistance due to refugee, veteran, or other allowed status.**²⁰

Sanctions

◆ **If a parent misses a required appointment, refuses or quits a job or in some other way fails to comply with an employment plan and is not able to establish "good cause" (e.g., lack of child care, illness, a family crisis, or other allowed circumstance), the family's cash benefit is reduced for three months. After three months of reduced benefits due to non-compliance (consecutive or not), the family's case is closed and the entire family loses the RI Works benefit.**²¹

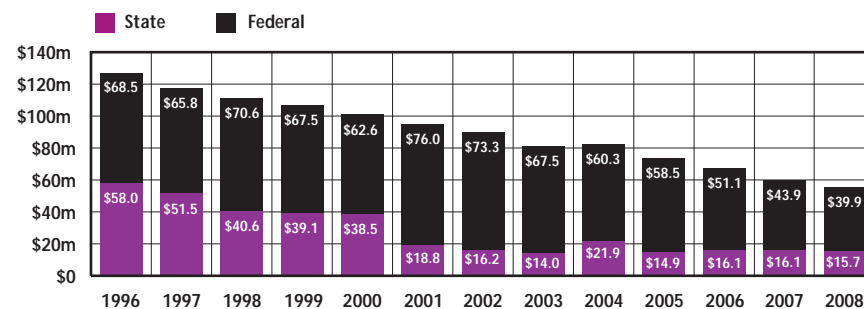
RI Works by Case Type, 2008

Total RI Works Caseload	8,424
Child-only cases	2,750
Cases with adults required to engage in a work activity	3,857
Cases with adults exempt from a work activity*	1,817

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, 2008.

*Exemptions from work activities include: caring for a disabled spouse or child (141), in third trimester of pregnancy (352), and youngest child under age one (1,324). Under RI Works regulations, recipients who have disabilities or who are age 60 or older are no longer exempt from work activities.

Rhode Island Cash Assistance Expenditures, State Fiscal Years 1996-2008



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, *Family Independence Program 2007 Annual Report* (FY 1996-2001); House Fiscal Advisory Staff. (2004-2008). *Budget as enacted: Fiscal Years 2005-2009*. Providence, RI: Rhode Island House of Representatives, (FY 2002-2007). November 2008 Caseload Estimating Conference (FY 2008).

◆ **Between State Fiscal Year (SFY) 1996 and SFY 2008, state general revenue spending for cash assistance decreased 69% from \$58.0 million to \$15.7 million.**^{22,23}

◆ **In SFY 2008, cash assistance represented less than 1% of Rhode Island's total federal and state budget expenditures of \$6.92 billion.**²⁴