

## Legislative Wrap-Up

### 2004 SESSION OF THE RHODE ISLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

*Selected laws and budget appropriations affecting children in the areas of economic well-being, health, education, child care and early childhood education, and safety.*

#### ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

**Family Independence Program (FIP):** The sanction process for FIP was amended. When a parent fails to comply with the employment plan requirement for more than 24 months (whether or not consecutive), the entire family, including children, loses the FIP cash benefit. During the first 24 months of non-compliance, the cash benefit is reduced by the parent's amount. While the 24 month "full family sanction" is less harsh than the 12 month time-frame originally proposed, it is a change from the former rule that required the FIP benefit to continue to decrease, but not end, after 24 months. This change will result in children, as well as adult family members, losing cash assistance benefits.\*

**Family Independence Program and Food Stamps Eligibility:** Adults convicted of a drug related felony will no longer be barred from receiving FIP or Food Stamps.

**Child Support Pass-Through:** The \$50 child support pass-through for families enrolled in the Family Independence Program was restored by the General Assembly. When a parent establishes paternity and the absent parent pays child support on time, the state pays the first \$50 of the child support to the family.\*

**Neighborhood Opportunities Program:** \$5 million was allocated for the Neighborhood Opportunities Program to support the development of new affordable housing units.\*

#### HEALTH

**RIte Care:** Funding for the RIte Care program was maintained. RIte Care eligibility thresholds and benefits remained the same. The RIte Care premium for families with an income over 150% of the federal poverty level remained the same, at 4% of income. Full RIte Care coverage was retained for income-eligible immigrant children.\*

**Early Intervention:** Responsibility for the Early Intervention program was transferred from the Rhode Island Department of Health to the Rhode Island Department of Human Services. The program is mandated by the federal special education law to provide a comprehensive coordinated program for screening, identification and service provision for children birth to age 3 with developmental risks or special needs.

**Lead Poisoning:** The deadline for landlords to comply with the *Lead Hazard Mitigation Law* was delayed by one year to July 2005. The *Lead Hazard Mitigation Law* is a comprehensive law that works to reduce lead hazards in housing and increase enforcement.



## EDUCATION

**State Aid to Education:** \$639.7 million was allocated to school aid. This is level funding from last year.

**Rhode Island Vision, Education and Services Program:** The House Legislative Commission “to promote comprehensive education and services for blind and visually impaired children” adopted a strategic plan focusing on a system of specialized educational programs and support services for all eligible children and eligible young adults. The budget includes \$100,000 to hire a program coordinator to oversee the implementation of the plan and to coordinate the elements of the comprehensive program. Through this initiative Rhode Island sets forth a series of steps towards improving education and services for blind and visually impaired children.



## CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

**Child Care:** The General Assembly voted to restore two proposed cuts to the child care subsidy program. The child care eligibility rate was maintained at 225% of the federal poverty level instead of rolling eligibility back to 200% of poverty. Child care subsidy co-payments were kept at current levels rather than increased. The General Assembly adopted a proposal to pay providers either the state rate or the private rate, whichever is less, for children receiving state subsidy.\*



## SAFETY

**Domestic Violence:** The General Assembly did not pass a law that could protect domestic violence victims from gun violence by prohibiting domestic abusers with restraining orders from purchasing and/or possessing firearms.

**R.I. Department of Children, Youth and Families: The Delinquent and Dependent Children O'Rourke Children's Center Law** was amended to require the Director of the Department of Children, Youth and Families to develop and maintain a comprehensive continuum of community treatment and out-of-home care for children in the care or custody of the state or at risk of being in state care.

**Training School for Youth:** The Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families presented to the General Assembly a new plan for the Training School for Youth. The plan includes two new main facilities (a separate detention facility and a unit for adjudicated males) at the Pastore Complex in Cranston, seven community re-entry homes in local communities, and a privately operated girls' unit.



## FISCAL YEAR 2005 BUDGET

The 2004 Rhode Island General Assembly session began with an estimated projected budget deficit of \$154.3 million for fiscal year 2005, according to the State Budget Office. The General Assembly passed a state budget in the amount of \$5.9 billion. The Governor vetoed the budget. The General Assembly overrode the Governor's veto and enacted a budget of \$5.9 billion for fiscal year 2005, representing a 1.4% increase from \$5.7 billion in fiscal year 2004. \$2.9 billion of the budget is state general revenue, \$1.8 billion is federal funds, \$114 million is restricted fees and \$1 billion is other funds.



## ONE RHODE ISLAND

“One Rhode Island” is a coalition of over 150 advocacy, religious, social service and policy organizations that promoted a platform of income and work supports for low and moderate income Rhode Islanders. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT participated in the steering committee, facilitated by the Poverty Institute, which developed the platform and worked together with coalition members for its enactment. Several items in One Rhode Island's platform were included in the budget, including: \$5 million for affordable housing, restoring the \$50 child support pass-through, maintaining the child care eligibility rate at 225% of poverty and maintaining child care subsidy co-payments at current levels rather than increasing them.

\* *This item was included in the One Rhode Island platform.*



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