

## Legislative Wrap-Up

### 2009 SESSION OF THE RHODE ISLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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

#### ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

**Child Support:** Legislation was enacted that allows the court to order a non-custodial parent to continue paying child support after the child reaches the age of 18 if he or she has a severe mental or physical impairment and continues to live with his or her custodial parent.

**Foreclosure Protection and Upkeep:** Legislation did not pass that would have helped to protect tenants affected by foreclosures by requiring notification to tenants of the foreclosure, providing them information on legal services and HUD-approved counseling and requiring provision of utilities after the foreclosure. Other legislation did not pass that would have protected the health, safety and welfare of neighborhoods affected by foreclosure by requiring upkeep of the foreclosed property.

**Neighborhood Opportunities Program:** The budget includes \$2.5 million for the Neighborhood Opportunities Program to address the housing and revitalization needs of deteriorating neighborhoods.

**Rhode Island Works Program (RI Works):** When RI Works replaced the Family Independence Program (FIP) in 2008, new time limits on cash assistance were imposed, including a lifetime time limit of 48 months and a periodic time limit of no more than 24 months in any 60-month period since May 1, 1997. The budget changed the periodic time limit so that now only assistance received since July 1, 2008 is counted. The effect of this

change is that no families will reach the 24-month periodic time limit until at least June 30, 2010. This change prevented 2,146 individuals from losing cash assistance on July 1, 2009.

**School Breakfast Program:** The budget includes a restoration of \$300,000 to reimburse administrative costs to school districts for the School Breakfast Program. The meals are paid for with federal funds.

#### HEALTH

**Global Waiver:** Legislation passed to provide legislative oversight of the Medicaid Global Waiver. This legislation requires the establishment of a Global Waiver Implementation Taskforce. Moreover, the oversight provisions state that any change in the Medicaid program that has to be made by creating a new rule or changing a current rule (including any changes in eligibility or benefits) must be approved by the General Assembly. The law also maintains the requirement that health care services for children and families be delivered through a managed care system.

**Medicaid Benefits:** Medicaid benefits for emergency room visits will be limited for all children and adults enrolled in Medicaid (including RIte Care members) to 12 visits to the Emergency Department per year as of a date still to be announced. Dental coverage for parents enrolled in RIte Care was preserved, as was the RIte Care "buy-in" program for pregnant women with incomes between 250% - 350% FPL.

**RItE Care Eligibility for Children:** Eligibility for RItE Care was maintained at 250% of the federal poverty level (FPL) for children and at 175% FPL for parents. RItE Care eligibility for lawfully residing immigrant children who also meet income guidelines was restored. These children had lost RItE Care coverage on June 1, 2008. Lawfully residing immigrant children will be required to re-apply for RItE Care at a date still to be announced by the RI Department of Human Services. Legislation did not pass that would have increased the income eligibility limit for RItE Care for children, nor did legislation pass that would have created a RItE Care buy-in program for children. Coverage for undocumented children was not restored.

**RItE Care Premiums:** RItE Care premiums were rolled back to July 2008 levels. The \$45 monthly RItE Care premium charged to families with incomes between 133% - 150% FPL was eliminated and the premium amounts for families between 150% - 250% FPL were reduced from 5% to 3% income. Both premium changes went into effect as of May 31, 2009. Legislation also passed that permits the state to recoup unpaid RItE Care premiums from state income tax returns, starting with calendar year 2009.



## SAFETY

**Children in Out-of-Home Placement:** Legislation did not pass that would have allowed a child in out-of-home placement to continue to attend school in his/her original school system should the child be moved to a placement in another city/town.

**Youth in State Care:** Legislation did not pass which would have extended eligibility for youth who receive Higher Education Opportunity Incentive Grants in Rhode Island. The grants help pay tuition and fees at state institutions of higher learning in Rhode Island for youth who age out of foster care. The legislation would have extended eligibility from age 21 to 23, if the youth reached the age of 21 while participating in this grant program.



## CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

**Child Care:** A proposal to change the way the Rhode Island Department of Human Services sets rates for child care providers serving children in the Child Care Assistance Program was not included in the enacted budget. This proposal would have removed the link between the child care reimbursement rate and the child care market rate survey.

**Head Start:** The budget includes funding for Head Start, including \$800,000 in general revenues and \$200,000 in base federal funds. It is estimated that the combination of general revenue and federal funds will provide Head Start services to 163 children.

**Pre-Kindergarten:** \$700,000 was included in the budget for the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to launch a Pre-K demonstration project using a mixed delivery system, including child care centers, Head Start programs and public schools.



## EDUCATION

**Charter Schools:** \$1.5 million was allocated in the budget to fund charter school expansion, including a new Mayoral Academy.

**Expanded Learning Time:** \$100,000 was included in the FY 2010 budget for the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to begin the Expanded Learning Time Initiative, a demonstration after-school and summer learning program that meets high quality standards.

**State Aid to Education:** The General Assembly provided \$662 million in state education aid to school districts and state schools for FY 2010. State aid for education was reduced by \$34 million from FY 2009 (which is the same amount districts are to receive from federal stabilization funds). Funding for professional development in the amount of \$495,000 was eliminated in the FY 2010 budget.



## FISCAL YEAR 2010 BUDGET

The Rhode Island General Assembly enacted a FY 2010 budget in the amount of \$7.8 billion. \$3 billion of the budget is state general revenue, \$2.1 billion is federal funds, \$162 million is restricted receipts, and \$1.8 billion is other funds. In addition, \$643.5 million (9%) of the FY 2010 budget is federal stimulus funds. The 2009 Rhode Island General Assembly had to close an estimated budget deficit of \$553 million for FY 2010.

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