



# Legislative Wrap-Up

## 2020 Session of the Rhode Island General Assembly

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, during the 2020 legislative session very few hearings were held after mid-March and few bills were passed and signed into law. The budget, which is normally passed and signed into law in late June, was not passed and signed into law until late December.

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

### Economic Well-Being

#### VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ \$65 million affordable housing and community revitalization bond was approved for ballot for March 2021 special election.
- ◆ The minimum wage increased from \$10.50 to \$11.50 per hour as of October 1, 2020.

**Minimum Wage:** Legislation passed that increased the minimum wage for hourly employees from \$10.50 to \$11.50 per hour beginning October 1, 2020.

**Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC):** The FY 2021 budget does not include the Governor's proposal to increase the State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in one percentage point increments each tax year for five years or from 15% to 20% by 2025.

**Rhode Island Works:** The FY 2021 budget includes \$1.5 million in COVID Relief Funds for an additional payment to families that participate in the state's cash assistance or TANF program. The annual clothing

allowance for children ages four and older was increased from \$30 per child to \$100 per child. Children under age four are not eligible for the clothing allowance under current state rules. The budget does not include proposed program changes to allow adults in the Rhode Island Works program to exclude earned income for up to six months or until the family's income exceeds 185% of the federal poverty level or the 48-month time limit is reached, whichever comes first, or to allow 18-year-olds to stay enrolled in Rhode Island Works as long as they are enrolled in high school. Legislation did not pass that would have increased the RI Works monthly benefit, which has not been raised in over 30 years.

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** The FY 2021 budget includes \$14 million in COVID Relief Funds for the SNAP program and includes an additional one-time benefit of \$600.

**Rhode Island Community Food Bank:** The FY 2021 budget includes \$670,000 in COVID Relief Funds and \$175,000 in general revenue for the Rhode Island Community Food Bank.

**School Meals:** The FY 2021 budget includes an additional \$9.8 million in federal funds to provide free, nutritious meals to children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Housing and Community Revitalization Bond:** The FY 2021 budget includes approval for a \$65 million bond to increase the availability of affordable housing and support community revitalization to be included on the ballot for a special election scheduled for March 2, 2021.

**Housing Discrimination:** Legislation did not pass that would have prohibited discrimination in housing against people who have a lawful source of income, including a Section 8 (Housing Choice) voucher or any other type of rental assistance.

**Permanent Source of Funding for Housing:** The budget did not include the establishment of a permanent funding stream for affordable housing generated through an increase in the real estate conveyance tax on property valued over \$500,000 that was included in the Governor's recommended budget for FY 2021.

**COVID-19 Relief for Housing:** The FY 2021 budget includes \$13.3 million in general revenue and federal funding to support eviction diversion, emergency rental relief, and other supports for Rhode Islanders facing housing insecurity.

## Early Learning & Development

### VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ \$15 million early childhood care and education facilities bond was approved for ballot for March 2021 special election.
- ◆ Head Start funding was maintained.

**Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP):** The FY 2021 budget did not include \$3.9 million in new state funding for permanent increases in rates for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers that was included in the Governor's proposed budget, and rates remain below the federal equal access benchmarks. However, the Governor temporarily increased rates using federal

funds through executive order starting in June 2020 and these rate increases have been continued on a month-by-month basis.

**Child Care Facilities:** The FY 2021 budget included approval for a \$15 million bond to support physical improvements to and development of licensed early childhood care and education facilities to be included on the ballot for a special election scheduled for March 2, 2021.

**The Early Educator Investment Act:** Legislation did not pass that would have required the state to set goals to increase compensation for educators who work in child care, family home visiting, and Early Intervention programs.

**The Early Childhood Innovation Act:** Legislation did not pass that would have allocated \$1 million in state funding per year to support new and existing early childhood models that help support learning and development of infants and toddlers.

**State Pre-K Program:** The FY 2021 budget includes \$14.9 million in state funding, the same amount allocated for FY 2020, and federal grant funding to support the new 17 classrooms added for the 2020-2021 school year. The budget did not include an additional \$4.5 million in new state funds as proposed in the Governor's budget.

**Head Start:** State funding for Head Start was maintained at \$1.2 million to serve 130 low-income children ages three and four.

**Family Home Visiting:** The FY 2021 budget did not include \$650,000 in state funding, to be matched by Medicaid, for evidence-based home visiting programs for the state's most vulnerable families as proposed in the Governor's budget.

**Paid Family Leave:** Legislation did not pass that would have improved the state's paid family leave program, Temporary Caregiver's Insurance (TCI). Proposed legislation would have expanded the number of weeks of TCI coverage from four to eight weeks and increased the wage replacement rate.

## Education

### VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ The tenth year of the Education funding formula was fully funded.
- ◆ The RI Promise Scholarship was funded for an additional year.

**Education Funding Formula:** The tenth year of the education funding formula was fully funded for FY 2021 with an increase of \$7.5 million in general revenue from FY 2020. The budget includes \$14.9 million for the State Pre-K program, \$7.6 million for transportation, \$4.5 million for high-cost special education, and \$5.0 million for Multilingual Learners/English Learners, consistent with the FY 2020 budget.

**COVID Relief Funds:** The FY 2021 budget includes increased federal funding to support schools, including \$39.4 million for K-12 Reopening of Schools and \$7.2 million for summer education programs, and \$602,000 in Rethink K-12 Education Grant funds to expand the Advanced Coursework Network to all grade levels, expand course offerings, and offer virtual dual enrollment courses and to expand the College Readiness Project courses in math and ELA to serve 8th and 12th graders in addition to 9th and 11th graders.

**School Resource Officers:** The FY 2021 budget includes \$325,000 for School Resource Officers, consistent with the state expenditures on this program in previous years. The budget does not include the Governor's proposal to expand qualifying expenditures to include hiring of new mental health professionals, including student assistance counselors, school counselors, psychologists, and social workers.

**Trauma-Informed Schools:** Legislation did not pass that would have established and implemented trauma-informed practices in schools throughout the state.

**Suspensions:** Legislation did not pass that would have limited the use of suspensions for students in Pre-K and elementary grades and required the use of restorative justice practices to address student behavior.

**High-Quality Curriculum:** The FY 2021 budget does not include funding of two new positions at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) to support school districts in defining high-quality curricula and establishing social studies standards.

**English Language Proficiency:** The FY 2021 budget includes \$425,000 in federal funds for the WIDA ACCESS test, an assessment of English language proficiency for Multilingual Learners. The budget does not include \$115,000 in general revenue funds for the ACCESS test as proposed by the Governor.

**World and Dual Language Immersion:** Legislation did not pass that would have provided \$200,000 in funding to RIDE to establish a dual language program fund and hire a specialist in world language and dual language instruction.

**Attendance:** Legislation did not pass that would have made public schools responsible for attendance data monitoring and detection of emergent truant behavior.

**Educators of Color:** Legislation did not pass that would have allowed the Commissioner of Education to implement strategies to reach the goal of hiring 200 new educators of color by 2025 and would have authorized Rhode Island Housing to administer programs for mortgage assistance to qualifying teachers.

**Out-of-School Time Learning:** Legislation did not pass that would have provided \$2.0 million to support afterschool, summer learning, and workforce development programs for students in grades kindergarten through grade 12.

**Child Opportunity Zones (COZs):** The FY 2021 budget includes \$395,000 in funding for COZs to provide integrated education, health, and social services to students attending school in 10 school districts, consistent with FY 2020.

**Maximum Class Size:** Legislation did not pass that would have set a maximum class size of 20 for children in kindergarten through grade 2.

**Field Trips:** Legislation did not pass that would have allowed fundraising for school field trips.

**Dual Enrollment:** The FY 2021 budget includes \$2.3 million for Prepare RI's dual/concurrent enrollment initiative that allows qualified students to earn college credit at their high school or at state public higher education institutions at no cost, \$900,000 less than recommended by the Governor.

**P-TECH:** The FY 2021 budget does not include \$200,000 to sustain the Pathways in Technology, Early College High School (P-TECH) Initiative, which supports partnerships among high schools, colleges, and businesses that help students earn both high school diplomas and associate degrees in five or six years while participating in mentorships and internships that prepare them for employment.

**RI Promise Scholarship:** The FY 2021 budget includes \$7.2 million from general revenues to support the fourth year of the RI Promise Scholarship at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI). The budget does not include the Governor's proposals to exclude grants awarded by DCYF or the College Crusade from being considered from the last dollar calculations for the RI Promise Scholarship and does not make the RI Promise Scholarship permanent.

**Wavemaker Fellowship:** The FY 2021 budget includes \$1.2 million to support the Wavemaker Fellowship, a competitive student loan reimbursement program for college and university graduates working in science, technology, engineering, and medicine. The budget does not include the Governor's proposed expansion of the program to include educators of science, technology, engineering, and math.

## Health

### VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ \$4.2 million to Health Equity Zones to provide a community-based response to COVID-19.

**Cigarette, Cigar, and E-Cigarette Tax:** The FY 2021 budget did not include the Governor's proposal to increase the cigarette tax by \$0.35 from \$4.25 to \$4.60 per pack and increase the cigar tax by \$0.30 from \$0.50 to \$0.80. The budget also does not include the Governor's proposal to add e-cigarettes to the definition of "other tobacco products" (OTP) and subject them to the OTP tax at the rate of 80% of the wholesale cost. The proposed new and increased taxes were projected to generate \$3.7 million in revenue.

**Perinatal Doula Services:** The FY 2021 budget did not include the Governor's proposal to allocate \$94,802 from general revenue, matched by Medicaid, to provide Medicaid coverage for perinatal doula services, which provide support to women before, during, and after childbirth.

**Health Equity Zones:** The FY 2021 budget includes \$4.2 million in federal funds for Health Equity Zones to collaborate with the Department of Health to provide a community-based response to COVID-19.

**Consumer Protections:** Legislation did not pass that would have codified consumer protections included in the Affordable Care Act (ACA), including prohibiting pre-existing condition exclusions, coverage of essential benefits such as pediatric dental and vision benefits, and no co-pays for preventive health care. The proposed state codification of the ACA had no fiscal impact and would have only taken effect upon the repeal of the ACA at the federal level.

**RIte Share:** The FY 2021 budget did not include the Governor's recommendation to maximize RIte Share enrollment by moving working Medicaid beneficiaries from standard Medicaid coverage onto employer-sponsored insurance, where the State will pay the costs of the employee's premium, rather than the full cost of



enrolling the employee in one of the State’s managed care plans. The proposal would have also established a new penalty for employers who do not comply with RIte Share reporting requirements.

**RIte Care:** The FY 2021 budget preserves RIte Care eligibility and benefits at current levels for children, parents, and pregnant women.

## Safety

### VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ LGBTQ families gained equal access to parentage protections.
- ◆ Legislation passed to prohibit 3D printed firearms and to require firearm sellers to contact the police department in the city or town of purchaser.

**DCYF Budget:** The FY 2021 budget included \$255 million for the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) budget, an increase compared to the FY 2020 enacted budget of \$229 million but level funding compared to the FY 2020 actual budget of \$255 million.

**RICHIST:** The FY 2021 budget did not provide authorization for the State of Rhode Island to borrow \$17 million to combine with \$11.2 million in federal funding to replace RICHIST, DCYF’s child welfare data system that has been in use since 1997.

**Higher Education Incentive Fund:** The FY 2021 budget included \$200,000 in general revenue funding for the DCYF Higher Education Incentive Fund, which is used to help former foster children attend postsecondary educational institutions in Rhode Island.

**Kinship Care:** Legislation did not pass that would have required DCYF and the Family Court to consider placing children in their care with immediate family members or next of kin before placement in another foster care arrangement.

**Academic Achievement for Children in DCYF Care:** Legislation did not pass that would have required

school superintendents to create annual reports on the progress and status of academic achievement of foster care youth.

**School Transportation for Children in DCYF Care:** Legislation did not pass that would have required the state to reimburse local school districts for the cost of transporting children in DCYF care to their home school district.

**Female Youth Project:** The FY 2021 budget did not include \$1.1 million for the Female Youth Project, which would have established and provided the first six months of operating costs for two in-state psychiatric residential treatment facilities for girls with complex behavioral healthcare needs currently being treated out-of-state, in a hospital, or at the Rhode Island Training School (RITS).

**RITS Module Redesign:** The FY 2021 budget did not include \$3.5 million from Rhode Island Capital Plan funds to redesign a module at the RITS to include an intake center with beds for youth entering the facility and an overflow area for sentenced youth so that non-sentenced youth can be kept separate from sentenced youth.

**Questioning of Juveniles:** Legislation did not pass that would have prohibited questioning a juvenile suspected of delinquent or criminal behavior unless their parent or guardian is present, an attorney is present, or the juvenile and their parents have waived their presence.

**Juvenile Life Without Parole:** Legislation did not pass that would have made adults who have been sentenced to life sentences without parole for crimes they committed before the age of 18 eligible for a parole hearing after serving 15 years of their sentence.

**Gun Safety:** Legislation passed that prohibits the manufacturing, importation, sale, shipment, delivery, possession, or transfer of guns that are undetectable by metal detectors commonly used at airports and public buildings, including 3D printed firearms. Legislation passed that requires sellers of firearms to send applications to purchase firearms to the police

department of the city or town where the purchaser lives so that local police can raise any concerns about mental health or other issues that could put the purchaser or the community at risk. Legislation did not pass that would have banned individuals with permits to carry concealed pistols or revolvers from carrying them on school grounds, banned the sale/possession of feeding devices holding more than 10 rounds of ammunition, banned assault weapons, and required firearms to be stored securely when not in use.

**Uniform Parentage Act:** Legislation passed that ensures equal access to parentage protections for children and families by establishing a process for married and unmarried parents to confirm their parentage of children born into a relationship with mutual intent and through assisted reproduction.

**Caseload Estimating Conference:** Legislation did not pass that would have required the participation of DCYF and BHDDH in the Caseload Estimating Conference.

## Fiscal Year 2021 Budget

The Rhode Island General Assembly enacted a FY 2021 budget in the amount of \$12.7 billion. The budget consists of \$4.2 billion in state general revenue, \$5.8 billion in federal funds, \$322 million in restricted receipts, and \$2.3 billion in other funds.



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT  
One Union Station  
Providence, RI 02903

Phone: (401) 351-9400  
rikids@rikidscount.org  
www.rikidscount.org

