

Thursday, February 19, 2015

ECONOMY

Study: RI child poverty rates have increased

By **Stephanie Turaj**
Staff Writer

Approximately one in five children in Rhode Island is living below the federal poverty line, according to a recent study released by Rhode Island Kids Count.

Poverty rates among the state's children rose from 15.5 percent in 2008 to 21.5 percent in 2013, while the U.S. rates increased from 18.2 percent to 22.2 percent during the same time period.

Rhode Island had the highest poverty rates of all the New England states in 2013.

The Rhode Island Kids Count study, which is available online at rikidscount.org, also analyzed poverty rates for Rhode Island

Poverty/A4

municipalities and found that poverty rates among children in North Kingstown and East Greenwich have increased since 2000.

The study found that 683 North Kingstown children, or 11.1 percent, lived in poverty from 2009 to 2013, compared to 663, or 9.7 percent, in 2000. In East Greenwich, 207 children – or 6.5 percent – lived in poverty from 2009 to 2013, compared to 147, or 4.1 per-

cent, in 2000.

The report did note that the figures for East Greenwich had a margin of error that was equal to or more than five percentage points.

"It's important to note that these numbers are an economic indicator; obviously it's very linked to the economic picture and the jobs picture in Rhode Island," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, director of Rhode Island Kids Count. "The percentage of poor children has to do with the amount of income in the household, and so it was not a surprise to see that child poverty in Rhode Island increased during the years of the recession."

The data is based on the federal poverty threshold, an income of \$18,769 for a family of three with two children, and \$23,624 for a family of four with two children, in 2013. Families with incomes below 50 percent of the federal poverty threshold are considered to be living in extreme poverty. In 2013, the extreme poverty level was \$9,385 for a family of three with two children and \$11,812 for a family of four with two children. In 2013, an estimated 9 percent, or 19,262, of all children in Rhode Island lived in extreme poverty.

While 53 percent of all poor children in Rhode Island are white, children of color and children of immigrants are more likely to grow up poor, according to the study. Single parenthood, low educational attainment, part-time or no employment and parents' low wages place children at risk for being poor.

"There are other ways that school districts measure a percentage of children who are eligible for free and reduced price lunch," Burke Bryant said. "There are short-term things that can be done to reduce the effects of poverty on children, whether that be making sure they are connected to nutrition programs, providing health care assistance and health care insurance while families are making the journey into jobs that can lift the families out of poverty. There's also long-term and short-term educational strategies."

According to the study, addressing child poverty in Rhode Island requires a multi-pronged approach, including developing strategies that attract high-wage jobs, improving the education levels of the current and future workforce and providing access to job training, literacy programs and English language acquisition.

Staff Writer Chris Church contributed to this report.

sk@scindependent.com