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New Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Brief: Housing Instability and Homelessness Among Rhode Island Children

Providence, RI (November 29, 2021) – About 75 community leaders, elected officials, and housing advocates will gather virtually on November 30, 2021 for the release of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT's latest *Policy Brief: Housing Instability and Homelessness Among Rhode Island Children*.

Speakers will include Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, and Martha Wofford, President and CEO of Blue Cross & Blue Shield, who will provide welcoming remarks. Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, will provide an overview of data and policy recommendations. A panel will provide their perspectives, including:

- Donna Wood, a parent who has experienced homelessness
- Ehren Hunt, Housing Specialist, Tri-County Community Action Agency
- Benji Chaplin, Co-Coordinator, Youth Action Board
- Denise DeBarros, Director of Family Engagement and Community Empowerment, Central Falls High School

Poor quality, unaffordable, or crowded housing has a negative impact on children's physical health, development, and emotional well-being and on a family's ability to meet their child's basic needs. When housing costs more than a family can afford, children often live in low-quality and overcrowded housing and move frequently, all of which have been linked to lower educational achievement and increased risk of homelessness. When children live in high-quality housing that is safe, affordable, and located in well-resourced neighborhoods, they do better in school and their parents report better mental health.

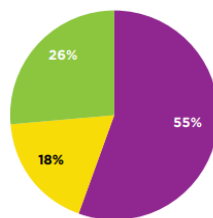
For many families living in deep poverty, episodes of homelessness are part of a cycle of housing instability that often includes living in housing that is unaffordable and/or unsafe, doubling up with families or friends, and being evicted. For these families, the shortage of housing that is affordable to them is the main reason they become homeless. **This situation became even more dire due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic hardships faced by families** who lost jobs, experienced a loss of income, or were forced to leave their jobs or cut their hours due to the lack of child care or in-person school during the pandemic.

At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, one in five renters in the U.S. reported that they could not keep up with their rent.

Rhode Island-Specific Data

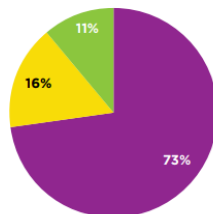
- In Rhode Island, 28% of renters surveyed from September 15 to October 22, 2021 reported that they could not keep up with their rent.
- An annual Point-in-Time count is conducted each year to get a count of people experiencing homelessness on a single winter night. The January 2021 count showed a dramatic increase in people experiencing homelessness, including a 26% increase in households with children (from 121 in 2020 to 153 in 2021).
- In Rhode Island in 2020, 323 families with 623 children stayed at an emergency homeless shelter, domestic violence shelter, or transitional housing facility at any point during the year.
- Shelter is not guaranteed and is often not available due to capacity limits, and Rhode Island is not a right to shelter state. As of November 16, 2021, 1,013 Rhode Islanders were seeking shelter. Almost half (45%) were in families with children, and 267 (26%) were children under age 18.
- From October 8 – November 6, 2021, 574 Rhode Islanders slept outside or in their cars for at least one night, and 156 were in households with children.
 - Almost half (44%) of the adults in these households with children had no income.
 - During that 30-day period, 62 children under the age of 18 slept outside or in their family’s car for at least one night.

RHODE ISLANDERS IN SHELTER QUEUE, NOVEMBER 16, 2021



55% ● Adults without Children
18% ● Adults in Households with Children
26% ● Children Under Age 18
N=1,013

RHODE ISLANDERS WHO SLEPT OUTSIDE OR IN THEIR CARS FOR AT LEAST ONE NIGHT, OCTOBER 8 - NOVEMBER 6, 2021



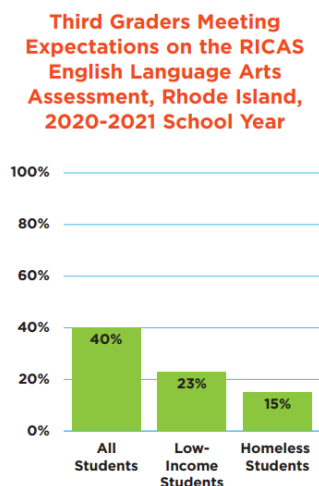
73% ● Adults without Children
16% ● Adults in Households with Children
11% ● Children Under Age 18
N=574

“Rhode Island is facing a housing crisis, one that began long before the COVID-19 pandemic but has only grown in severity. The housing and homelessness crisis disproportionately hurts families with children, particularly families of color. It is urgent that we invest in our state’s housing infrastructure to support our families, our communities, and our economy,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

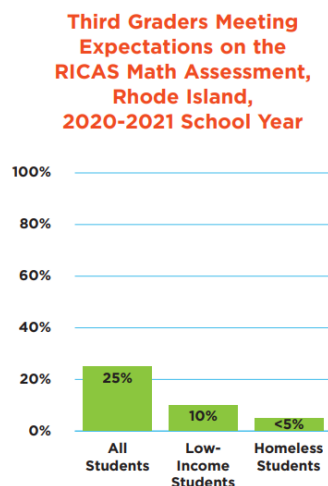
Housing instability and homelessness affects children far beyond in-the-moment chaos and deep stress.

- Homeless children have higher rates of acute and chronic health problems than low-income children who have homes. Compared with their peers, homeless children have four times as many respiratory infections, twice as many ear infections, and five times as many gastrointestinal problems.
- Homeless children are more likely to change schools, be chronically absent from school, and have lower academic achievement than children who have secure housing.

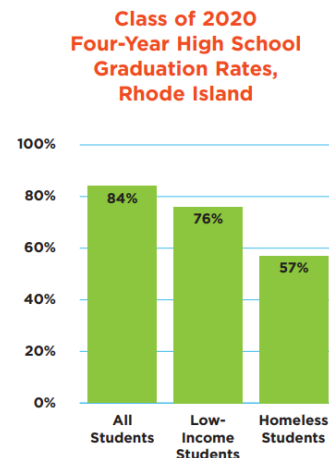
THE EFFECTS OF HOUSING INSTABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS ON CHILDREN’S EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education. *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2020-2021 school year. Student performance may have been influenced by disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Source: Rhode Island Department of Education. Class of 2020.

“Every child deserves a safe, stable, and secure place to lay their head at night,” said Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “Housing is health. Housing is family well-being. Housing is educational success. Housing is the very foundation of a child’s future.”

Federal Aid to Address Housing Instability and Homelessness

- Both the *CARES Act* and the *American Rescue Plan Act*, passed in March 2021, included funding for rental assistance and funding to help individuals and families experiencing homelessness. In Rhode Island, these funds have been distributed through a variety of programs administered by the United Way of Rhode Island, **Rhode Island Housing, and Crossroads Rhode Island. Rent Relief RI (rihousing.com/rentreliefri) will continue to accept applications for assistance through September 2022.**
- The *American Rescue Plan Act* dedicated \$800 million to the identification, enrollment, and school success of children and youth experiencing homelessness, and the *Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund* includes funds to support the needs of students disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures, including students experiencing homelessness.

Recommendations

- The *Policy Brief* contains key recommendations to support children and families currently experiencing housing instability and homelessness, as well as recommendations for prevention efforts. Please see page 7 of the publication for our full list of recommendations.

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education, and development of Rhode Island children with a core focus on equity.