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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to release new *Issue Brief:*
Working Parents, Child Care, and Paid Family Leave in Rhode Island

The Issue Brief includes data and research on low-income working families as well as provide a deeper analysis of three key policies – child care assistance, paid family leave, and earned sick leave – that promote family economic security and children’s development and school readiness.

The Issue Brief also includes recommendations on how to improve these policies to best support low-income working parents and their young children in Rhode Island.

Providence, RI (June 1, 2018): Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release its newest publication, *Working Parents, Child Care, and Paid Family Leave in Rhode Island*, at a policy roundtable on Monday, June 4, 2018 from 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, Providence, RI. Featured speakers will include Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT; Eric Beane, Secretary, Executive Office of Health and Human Services; Courtney Hawkins, Director, Rhode Island Department of Human Services; Scott Jensen, Director, Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training; Representative Grace Diaz; and Senator Elizabeth Crowley. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Senior Policy Analyst Leanne Barrett will share findings from the *Issue Brief*.

To Succeed, Families Need Economic Security and High-Quality Child Care

Children are more likely to thrive, succeed in school, and reach their potential when their families are economically secure and when they receive consistent, nurturing care and learning experiences from their parents and other caregivers. To be successful at work and in raising children to reach their potential, working parents need high-quality child care and the ability to take paid leave when needed to attend to parenting responsibilities.

“Child care, paid family leave, and earned sick leave are critical policies to support working families,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “Rhode Island has made progress in implementing paid family leave and earned sick leave, and now has the opportunity to take a major step forward by establishing quality child care rates to improve access to high quality child care programs. High quality child care has the double benefit of supporting parents to work and ensuring that children have enriching early learning programs that improve their school readiness.”

Families with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) (\$41,560 for a family of three in 2018) do not have enough income to meet their basic needs. Even with at least one parent working full-time, full-year, many children in Rhode Island and the U.S. live in families without sufficient resources to meet their basic needs.

Parents with low wage jobs often face great instability and stress because they have little paid time off to attend to parenting responsibilities and great difficulty accessing high-quality early care and education programs.

For this reason, the *Issue Brief* focuses closely on analysis of three key policies – child care assistance, paid family leave, and earned sick leave.

A Snapshot of Low-income Working Families in Rhode Island

- In Rhode Island, 72% of all children under age six and 77% of all children ages six to 17 have all parents in the workforce, higher than the U.S. rate of 65% and 71%.
- In Rhode Island, more than two out of five children under age six (42%) live in families that are low-income. The majority of parents in these families are working – 77% of children in low-income families have parents that work.

Child Care

In Rhode Island, the average cost of full-time care for an infant is more than the average cost for tuition and fees at public colleges. The average annual cost of child care for two children, an infant and a three-year-old, is higher than the average annualized mortgage and is more than twice the state's median rent. Rhode Island's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) serves low-income, working families with income at or below 180% FPL (\$37,404 for a family of three in 2018).

High-quality early care and education is characterized by consistent, warm, nurturing, and language-rich interactions between teachers and children. High-quality programs offer a variety of educational activities, use age-appropriate curricula, engage families, and implement strong health and safety-practices. High-quality care giving and educational activities are associated with small classes and groups of children, fewer children per adult, and staff with college degrees and early childhood credentials.

Rhode Island's child care rates through CCAP do not support or incentivize quality child care. It is important to pass Budget Article 15 and legislation so that Rhode Island can join 41 other states that use a child care quality rate structure that promotes access to high-quality child care for low-income families.

Paid Family Leave

Both children and parents do better when parents can take time off from work when a new child joins the family through birth, foster care, or adoption. The U.S. is one of only a handful of advanced, industrialized nations that does not provide paid family leave to support family economic security while parents care for newborns.

In 2013, Rhode Island became the third state in the U.S. to establish a paid family leave program. Connected to the state's Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) program, the Temporary Caregivers Insurance (TCI) program provides up to four weeks of paid time off to care for a new child or seriously ill family member. Both the TDI and the TCI program are financed entirely through employee contributions, and both provide only a partial wage replacement (approximately ^{two-thirds} two-thirds of regular pay). Data show that low-wage workers are less likely to take leave than higher-wage workers, even when it is available.

Earned Sick Leave

All children need preventive pediatric health care, including immunizations, developmental screenings, anticipatory guidance, and dental care. The current recommended schedule for routine, preventive pediatric health care has 12 visits before age three and then annual visits through age 18, for a total of 28 visits. In addition, almost all children experience routine illnesses each year (e.g. croup, strep throat, flu, etc.) and about 15% have chronic health care issues requiring frequent monitoring and ongoing care. Without access to paid time off to care for children, employed parents may forgo preventive health care, miss immunizations, or experience wage and job loss when taking time off to care for their children.

In 2017, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation that requires employers with 18 or more workers to provide paid sick time that can be used by employees to care for themselves or to care for family members. Specifically, paid sick time can be used to care for sick children and to bring children to preventive health care appointments. Starting in July 2018, employers must provide a minimum of three paid sick days for full-time workers. The minimum number of days will increase to four days in 2019 and five days in 2020. Employers that have fewer than 18 workers must allow employees the same time off, but are not required to pay workers for this time. **Rhode Island is now one of nine states to enact earned sick leave laws.**

Recommendations

The *Issue Brief* includes recommendations to best support low-income working parents and their young children in Rhode Island:

Expand Access to High-Quality Child Care

- Implement tiered quality rates for CCAP to support and incentivize quality improvement. Ensure that rates for high-quality child care programs are at or above the federal benchmark (75th percentile of a recent market rate survey) to ensure equal access to quality child care.
- Provide intensive and individualized supports to all child care programs (early learning centers, family child care homes, and after-school/summer programs) to promote quality improvement, including access to on-site consultation and coaching, scholarships to help educators complete post-secondary education, and grants to improve facilities and purchase equipment, books, and educational materials.
- Implement wage supplements to attract and retain qualified and effective early childhood educators in programs serving the youngest children.
- Expand child care subsidies to serve more low- and moderate- income families, up to 300% FPL.

Expand Access to Paid Family Leave and Earned Sick Leave

- Expand the Temporary Caregivers Insurance Program to cover up to 12 weeks of paid time off to care for a new child or seriously ill family member.
- Improve wage replacement rates for low-wage workers so their families can remain financially stable and their children can experience the improved outcomes associated with time at home with parents.
- Ensure employees, particularly those who have low-wage jobs, are notified about the availability of both paid family leave and earned sick leave, including the ability to take sick leave to care for children experiencing routine illnesses and to bring children to preventive health care appointments.

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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.