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## **RHODE ISLAND RANKED AS WORKING EFFECTIVELY FOR BABIES in *THE STATE OF BABIES YEARBOOK: 2021***

*COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing disparities  
among young children and their families*

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WASHINGTON, DC – New data released today shows that though Rhode Island ranks in the top tier of states for babies, it still has room to grow. The *State of Babies Yearbook: 2021*, released today by national early childhood development nonprofit ZERO TO THREE, comes at a critical time in our nation’s response to the ongoing public health crisis and resulting economic fallout. The research compiles 60 indicators that affect the well-being of children ages zero to three and provides an in-depth look at national and state-by-state progress across three policy areas: Good Health, Strong Families, and Positive Early Learning Experiences. *The State of Babies Yearbook: 2021* placed Rhode Island in the Working Effectively (W) tier of states for babies.

Though the pandemic itself was unexpected, our longstanding failure to support families with young children – particularly Black and Brown families and those with low income – ensured that those who were already facing barriers due to longstanding disparities and a lack of equity have been disproportionately harmed by the pandemic.

New data this year shows significant disparities in opportunity for our youngest children throughout the country. In every state—including Rhode Island—babies of color, babies in families with low-incomes, and in urban or rural areas face inequities that challenge the foundational brain development of the earliest years. The pandemic has further exposed and exacerbated existing disparities and structural barriers, which have harmful and life-altering effects that begin even before birth and can last a lifetime.

Rhode Island is home to 32,224 babies, representing 3 percent of the state’s population. As many as 29.97 percent live in households with incomes less than twice the federal poverty line (in 2019, about \$51,500 a year for a family of four), placing them at economic disadvantage. America’s youngest children are diverse and are raised in a variety of family contexts. In Rhode Island, 45.3 percent of babies are children of color. Due to historical disparities grounded in systemic racism, a broad array of policies and services are required to ensure all of them have an equitable start in life.

Rhode Island has a strong foundation of effective policies to build on, including a state paid family leave program that helps some families stay home with newborns, and high health insurance coverage and vaccination rates. Even so, the *State of Babies Yearbook: 2021* shows that the littlest Rhode Islanders face big challenges, and that the state’s policies and programs can make a difference in their ability to

reach their full potential. The Yearbook highlights areas where Rhode Island can do better for our babies. The state has significant work to do to reduce infant maltreatment, and improve access to high-quality child care.

“It has never been more important to tell the story of Rhode Island’s babies. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the littlest among us did not have what they needed to thrive,” said Myra Jones-Taylor, Chief Policy Officer of ZERO TO THREE. “We did not need a crystal ball to know that the pandemic would have lasting effects on children, their families, the state of Rhode Island, and our nation. As advocates for babies, we must push for those permanent policies that we know will address the barriers our children face.”

"Babies are Rhode Island's future. Equitable, long-term, sustained investments in infants, toddlers, and their families must be prioritized because the early years are the foundation of all that follows and supporting families with young children is essential to the state’s recovery and success," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, a state partner of ZERO TO THREE’s Think Babies.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and The Right from the Start Campaign ([www.RightfromtheStartRI.org](http://www.RightfromtheStartRI.org)) are focused on advancing critical policies in 2021 to help families with infants and toddlers:

- Enact strong state and federal revenue policies to maintain, expand and improve essential programs that are a lifeline for babies, young children, and families.
- Pass the RI Child Care is Essential Act to make the increased rates for child care providers permanent and expand access to the Child Care Assistance Program so more working families can get help paying for child care.
- Pass the RI Early Educator Investment Act to establish goals to increase early educator wages. Early educators, almost all of whom are women and many are people of color, are among the lowest paid workers in the state.
- Improve our state’s paid family leave program (Temporary Caregivers Insurance) to match national benchmarks by increasing wage replacement rates and extending the number of weeks.
- Cover community-based doula services through Medicaid and private health insurance.
- Promote maternal physical and mental health by extending Medicaid coverage for moms through 12 months postpartum.

Decisions that affect babies and families happen at all levels of government. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has joined ZERO TO THREE and nearly 70 other national and state organizations to amplify the *Think Babies* message nationally and elevate the importance of the first three years in Rhode Island. On May 18, they will join families and babies from all 50 states and DC to urge Congress to boldly invest in our future as part of the national *Strolling Thunder™* event

To access the national profile and state data, visit [stateofbabies.org](http://stateofbabies.org).

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**About ZERO TO THREE**

ZERO TO THREE works to ensure all infants and toddlers benefit from the family and community connections critical to their well-being and development. Since 1977, the organization has advanced the proven power of nurturing relationships by transforming the science of early childhood into helpful resources, practical tools and responsive policies for millions of parents, professionals and policymakers. For more information, and to learn how to become a ZERO TO THREE member, please visit [zerotothree.org](http://zerotothree.org), [facebook.com/zerotothree](https://facebook.com/zerotothree), or follow [@ZEROTOTHREE](https://twitter.com/ZEROTOTHREE) on Twitter.

**About *Think Babies*<sup>™</sup>**

ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies* to make the potential of every baby a national priority. When we *Think Babies* and invest in infants, toddlers, and their families, we ensure a strong future for us all. Learn more at [thinkbabies.org](http://thinkbabies.org) or follow [@ZEROTOTHREE](https://twitter.com/ZEROTOTHREE) on Twitter.

**About Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**

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. Please visit [rikidscount.org](http://rikidscount.org) and follow [@RIKIDSCOUNT](https://twitter.com/RIKIDSCOUNT) on Twitter.