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**NEW DATA SHOWS RHODE ISLAND STILL HAS WORK TO DO TO SUPPORT BABIES**

*Families with infants and toddlers, particularly in underserved communities, continue to struggle in the absence of strong national policy agenda*

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PROVIDENCE, RI – New data released today shows babies in Rhode Island and across the country continue to struggle in the absence of responsive policies from our local and national leaders. Despite Rhode Island’s ranking as a top state for babies, children living in families with low income and children of color still face daunting obstacles, created in large part by structural racism and inadequate wages that make it difficult for them to reach their true potential.

The *State of Babies Yearbook: 2022*, released today by national early childhood development nonprofit ZERO TO THREE, comes at a critical time in our nation’s response to families struggling amid the economic fallout from the ongoing public health crisis. Every parent and caregiver wants to give their child a strong start in life, but the *State of Babies Yearbook* makes clear that families with young children have long lacked the supports that would help in times of crisis or calm. The report compiles 60 indicators that affect the well-being of children prenatal 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.

Though Rhode Island was among 12 states across the United States to earn a top ranking, the *State of Babies Yearbook: 2022* shows that some of the littlest Rhode Islanders still face big challenges, and that effective policies and programs in Rhode Island can make a difference in their ability to reach their full potential. The *Yearbook* highlights areas where Rhode Island can do better for its babies.

“Though all babies are born with unlimited potential, opportunities for Rhode Island’s babies to grow and flourish are not shared equally,” shared Miriam Calderón, Chief Policy Officer at ZERO TO THREE. “These findings show that disparities facing babies of color and babies in families with low income are draining our nation’s future potential and leaving parents to fend for themselves. Without immediate action, our policymakers’ longstanding failure to enact powerful family-centered policies and programs will have lasting effects on children, their families, the state of Rhode Island, and our nation. As advocates for babies, we must push for 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*. She continued, “There is an urgent need for Rhode Island to increase access to quality child care

for infants and toddlers by increasing rates, eligibility, and early educator compensation so that families can work knowing that their babies are learning and thriving. We also need to make improvements to our Paid Family Leave Program so that parents have more time with their babies, provide Rite Care health insurance coverage for all children regardless of immigration status, and extend postpartum care for new mothers from 60 days to 12 months. We have made progress as a state but there is more work to do.”

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 2022 to help families with infants and toddlers:

- **State Budget Investments in Child Care, Early Education, Early Intervention, and Child & Maternal Health (H-7123)**
- **RI Child Care is Essential Act (H-7177 / S-2681, H-7123 Article 13):** Help more families access high-quality, reliable, affordable child care through the Child Care Assistance Program. Increase rates and expand eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program. Safe, healthy, and high-quality child care options are essential for parents to work and for children to thrive.
- **RI Early Educator Investment Act (H-7283 / S-2235, H-7123, Article 1):** Develop goals and strategies to improve early educator compensation in child care, RI Pre-K, family home visiting, and Early Intervention programs. Stagnant and uncompetitive wages are causing staffing challenges and reducing access to high-quality child care, Early Intervention and family home visiting services.
- **RI Pre-K & Head Start:** Prepare to expand high-quality preschool in diverse delivery settings (child care, Head Start, and public schools) so all 3- and 4-year-olds will be able to participate.
- **Early Intervention & First Connections (H-7628 / S-2546):** Update Medicaid rates that have been frozen for 20 years so programs can retain and recruit skilled staff, eliminate waiting lists, and serve infants and toddlers with developmental challenges.
- **Paid Family Leave program (H-7444, H-7551/S-2245, H-7794, H-7717/S-2243):** Add weeks and improve wage replacement rates to help new parents. All new parents need adequate time and income to care for newborns, adoptive, and foster children at home for at least 12 weeks.
- **Cover All Kids (H-7484 / S-2187, H-7123, Article 12):** Ensure all children in Rhode Island have health insurance, regardless of immigration status.
- **Maternal Health Care (H-7290 / S-2202, H-7123, Article 12):** Extend Medicaid through 12-months postpartum, regardless of immigration status, so new moms can have consistent health care.
- **Infant/Early Childhood Mental Wellness (H-7801 / S-2614):** Develop Medicaid strategies to improve screening, assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of infant/early childhood mental health challenges (birth through age 5).
- **Revenue for Rhode Island (H-7440 / S-2264):** Increase state general revenue to fund programs that young families and children need.
- **Let RI Vote (H-7100 / S-2007 & H-7225 / S-2216):** Let’s make it easier for Rhode Island’s busy parents to vote by mail or early in-person.

Decisions that affect babies and families happen at all levels of government. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has joined ZERO TO THREE and more than 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

17, 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*<sup>TM</sup> 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 on Twitter.

#### **About *Think Babies*<sup>TM</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 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 on Twitter.