



Testimony Re: H- 5151, Article 11  
House Finance Committee  
March 12, 2019

The Economic Progress Institute supports the proposal to expand the RI Promise Program as proposed in Article 11. We have long advocated for the state to take steps to ensure that all our residents have the opportunity to attain at least two-years post-secondary education, credential or training so they can meet the demand for the middle-skill jobs in our state. Making it possible for more Rhode Islanders to achieve at least a two-year post-secondary education degree or credential is vital to their ability to obtain a ‘middle skill’ job, the majority of jobs in Rhode Island now and into the future. (See chart 1) Encouraging students to complete a four year degree boosts their earnings capacity significantly. (See chart 2) An educated workforce is vital, of course, to current Rhode Island employers and to attracting new employers to our state.

Expanding RI Promise to adults attending CCRI is a welcome change. **However, we do not agree that the program should be available to adults only once they turn 25.** The current RI Promise program is available to students who graduate high school or earn an equivalency diploma before age 19 and enroll directly at CCRI. Setting the eligibility age for adults at 25, leaves a big gap – young adults between the ages of 19 and 24 would not be eligible for RI Promise. Yet this is precisely the group of young adults we should be encouraging to continue their education because they are likely to be already motivated to do so.

Of the 1,400 individuals who took the GED exam in CY 2018, over one-third (34%) were young people age 19 – 24, with the majority (26%) of that cohort age 20 – 24. These young people were motivated to obtain their GED and the door to CCRI should be opened to them with the availability of RI Promise.

Extending RI Promise to 19 – 24 year olds would also make college possible for the many young people who graduate from high school, go to work and then realize that in order to earn a living wage, they need additional education.

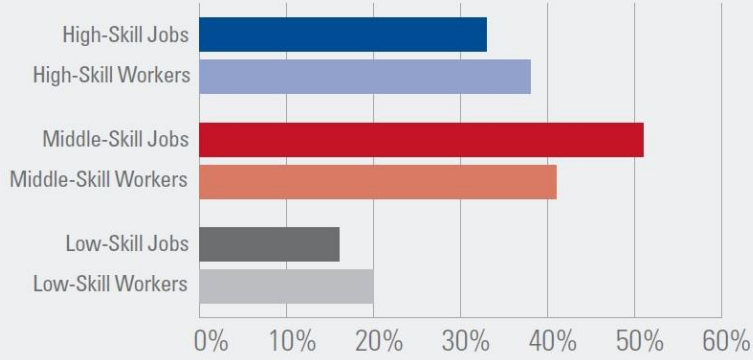
The proposed RI Promise for adults wisely allows them to **qualify if they are attending school part-time** (at least 18 credit hours or more on an annual basis) as well as full-time, since young adults are likely to need to be working to support themselves and cannot carry a full course load.

Certainly young adults who are parents need to be working to support their families, so **the proposal to allow RI Promise parents to enroll in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), the state’s subsidized child care program makes sense.** Helping the parent with the high cost of child care, so she/he has time to attend school, study, and work makes it more likely that the parent will be able to successfully complete the chosen course of study on time.

Improving opportunities for our high school graduates to continue their education, and for adults to attain post-secondary degrees is an important part of a comprehensive approach to ensuring more Rhode Islanders can attain economic security and employers have the skilled workforce they need to compete in the national and global economies. A comprehensive approach includes expanding early learning opportunities for children through expanding pre-K and child care (areas that have also seen investments over the past few years); ensuring high quality K-12 schools that meet the diverse needs of all students; and providing more opportunities for the current adult workforce to improve their skills and earnings capacity, such as ending the waiting list for adults anxious to improve their English language skills.

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### Jobs and Workers by Skill Level, Rhode Island, 2015



Source: NSC analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics by State, May 2015 and American Community Survey data, 2015.

Chart 1

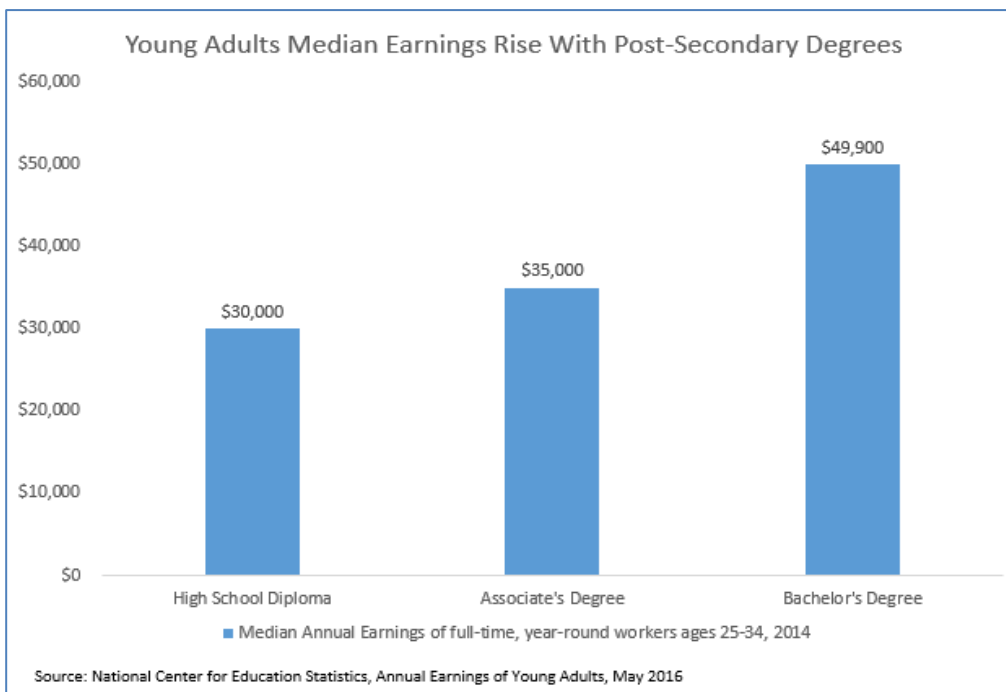


Chart 2