Moving Forward, Standing Still: Policy Actions in the 2019 Rhode Island Legislative Session

Moving Forward

1. **Rhode Island Works 24-month Time Limit Repealed**
   The budget repealed the RI Works 24-month periodic time limit, while retaining the 48-month lifetime limit. This streamlines the program (RI was one of only 8 states with two time limits) and improves opportunities for parents enrolled in this cash assistance/work-readiness program to gain the skills they need to obtain well-paying jobs.

2. **Increased Funding for K-12 English Language Learners**
   The budget added $2.3 million to address the needs of English language learners, bringing the total investment to $5 million. While not nearly sufficient, the funding should help close achievement gaps for many Rhode Island children.

3. **Free Bus Passes for Seniors and People with Disabilities**
   The budget includes $5 million in permanent annual funding for the No-Fare Bus Pass Program which serves over 5,000 seniors and 13,000 people with disabilities.

Standing Still

1. **No Minimum Wage Increase**
   The current $10.50/hr. minimum wage was not increased, despite both budget and legislative proposals to do so. Massachusetts’ minimum hourly wage is $12 and Connecticut’s will rise to $11 in October. Both states are on a path to raise the minimum wage to $15 by 2023.

2. **No Increase to Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**
   The EITC, a refundable tax credit that puts money in the pockets of low- and moderate-income workers, remains at 15% of the federal credit. Legislative proposals to raise the rate to 20% failed. Working families in other New England states have a higher credit: Connecticut (23%), Massachusetts (30%), and Vermont (36%).

3. **Limited Investment in the Child Care Assistance Program**
   The budget did not include the requested $738,000 to increase rates paid to child care centers caring for pre-school aged children and rejected a proposed $200,000 to allow parents enrolled full-time in higher education to access the subsidized child care program. (The budget included $150,000 for family child care providers to implement a tiered-rate structure.)

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