

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1 Rhode Island Works 24-month Time Limit Repealed

The budget repealed the RI Works 24-month periodic time limit, while retaining the 48-month lifetime limit.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.)