



To help some of the state's poorest families, these bills propose four changes to the Rhode Island Works program — the state's cash assistance and workforce readiness program for children and their parents.

Increase economic support for families while Receiving RI Works Benefits

Increase the monthly cash assistance payment from 30% to 50% of the federal poverty level, to move children out of deep poverty.

- The benefit payment has not been changed in 30 years. RI is the only New England state that has not increased its benefit and has the lowest payment in the region. Massachusetts increased the benefit last year. Both New Hampshire and Maine have statutorily required yearly increases.
- Raising the benefit to 50% FPL would increase the benefit for a family of 3 from \$554 to \$915.
- Close to 6,000 children and parents living in 2,500 families would benefit.

Provide the yearly clothing allowance to all children in the family

- Current law permits the \$100 yearly clothing allowance to be provided only to children age 4 and older.
- The statutory change would require the allowance to be paid to all children, including infants and toddlers, as well as children with disabilities who receive SSI benefits and do not receive the RI Works payment. Around 1,400 children would become newly eligible for the payment. The bills would also set the minimum yearly clothing allowance at \$100.

Promote Longer-term Economic Security

Allow a parent to attend CCRI for two years as her employment plan activity.

- RI Works provides parents with opportunities to gain skills for employment and most parents are required to have an active "employment plan" as a condition of receiving benefits.
- Current rules allow a parent to attend CCRI for one year as her only employment plan activity. In the second year, the parent must be working at least 20 hours/week if she wants to continue her education at CCRI.
- According to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), in 2018 workers with an associate degree had median weekly earnings of \$862, compared with just \$730 for people with a high school diploma alone.

Exclude income from earnings for up to 6 months when a parent starts a job

- Under current law, when a parent starts a job, earnings are counted immediately and even a minimum wage job, (\$1,743/month) results in the parent losing the cash benefit in the month after the job starts.
- The statutory change would allow a parent to continue to receive the cash benefit for 6 months unless she reaches the time limit or earns 185% FPL (\$3,385/month for a family of 3). When the parent is ineligible for cash assistance, she loses the transportation benefit and case management support that are critical to job retention.

Funding the Changes

Rhode Island receives \$96M in federal funding from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant to support low-income families with children under 18 which can be used to pay for these proposals. The estimated cost of the proposals in 2022 is \$10M.