



To help some of the **poorest children** & families, these bills propose **three changes** to the **Rhode Island Works Program**, (the state's cash assistance and workforce readiness program).

LIFT CHILDREN OUT OF DEEP POVERTY BY INCREASING THE MONTHLY BENEFIT AND REQUIRING AN ANNUAL COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT.

- The benefit increase last year moved the needle on economic well-being for the 5,000 children receiving benefits, but they are still living in deep poverty. Increasing the monthly benefit to 50% of the poverty level (from \$721 to \$959 for a family of 3) will further help Rhode Island's poorest children.
- An annual cost-of-living adjustment will prevent the loss of the value of the RI Works monthly benefit over time. During the recent ten-year period (2012 - 2021), the cost-of-living has increased annually by an average of 1.9%. More recently, basic needs items for families with young children have increased significantly. For example, the average unit price of diapers increased 14% from January 2021 to January 2022.
- Children living in poverty, especially those living in deep poverty, are more likely to have health, behavioral, educational, economic, and social difficulties, earn less as adults, and be unemployed more frequently.

ALLOW PARENTS ON RI WORKS TO ATTEND 2 YEARS AT CCRI

- Currently RI Works parents can attend only one year at CCRI without additional activities. In the second year, the parent must add at least 20 hours/week of employment if she wants to continue her education while keeping RIW benefits.
- Between 2019 and 2029, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certification are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring a high school diploma or less.
- In 2020, workers with an associate's degree had median weekly earnings of \$938 and an unemployment rate of 7.1%, compared with just \$781 per week and a 9.0% unemployment rate for people with a high school diploma alone.

EXTEND THE LIFETIME BENEFIT LIMIT FROM 48 MONTHS TO 60 MONTHS

- Federal law allows states to provide 60 months of TANF-funded benefits to needy children and families. (TANF is the federal program that funds the RI Works program.)
- Rhode Island is one of only 11 states that have a limit that is less than 60 months.
- Families that reach the 48-month limit must file an application for "hardship benefits" to keep their assistance and work-readiness services. Since most families file for "hardship", extending the lifetime limit to 60 months would significantly reduce stress and hardship on families and ease the process for DHS staff.

USE MORE OF THE FEDERAL TANF BLOCK GRANT FOR ITS PRIMARY PURPOSE—SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- Rhode Island receives \$95 million in federal funds through the TANF block grant.
- In 2020, Rhode Island spent about \$22 million of TANF funds on basic assistance – only 14% of the total. Nationally, 22% of the block grant was spent on basic assistance that year. Even with the benefit increase enacted in 2021, the share of the block grant that supports young children and their families will remain a small portion of the available federal funds. RI should invest more of the block grant in direct assistance for the 2,700 families enrolled in the program.