



## 2022 Policy Agenda

### Advancing Equity and Economic Opportunities in Rhode Island

The Economic Progress Institute's 2022 Policy Agenda focuses on **advancing equity** in Rhode Island and encompasses policy priorities informed by community members and our partners. The pursuit of equity pulls together many issues of concern that might otherwise seem like isolated issues. For example, historic housing discrimination going back decades coupled with tax policy favoring homeowners over renters helped create ongoing racial wealth disparities. Poverty and economic well-being are multi-dimensional issues that benefit from a holistic approach, allowing one to see the connections linking individual policies. EPI has identified **five main areas of opportunity** to advance policies centered around racial, ethnic, and gender equity and to thereby help ensure the economic well-being of all Rhode Islanders.

- **ECONOMIC EQUITY AND JUSTICE** to expand economic security for workers and families
- **TAX, BUDGET, AND REVENUE FAIRNESS AND EQUITY** to raise revenue fairly and invest wisely in recovery
- **EQUITY FOR IMMIGRANTS** to extend security and opportunity to all Rhode Islanders
- **EQUITY IN HEALTHCARE** to protect and promote the health of all Rhode Islanders
- **DEMOCRACY AND EQUITY IN ACTION** to make room for broader participation in the political and legislative processes

## ECONOMIC EQUITY AND JUSTICE

to expand economic security and opportunity for workers and families

- **Improve the RI Works program**

Lift children out of deep poverty by increasing the monthly cash benefit to 50% of the federal poverty level (from \$721 to \$959 for a family of 3); extend the lifetime limit from 48 to 60 months; permit attendance at CCRI for 24 months as allowable employment plan activity [House 7789 \(Handy\)](#) / [Senate 2316 \(Murray\)](#)

Increase from \$50 to \$100 the amount of child support paid by each non-custodial parent that is 'passed through' to their children receiving RI Works. [Senate 2602 \(Anderson\)](#)

\*[Raising RI Coalition](#)

- **Increase funding to train lower-skilled workers**

Increase access to foundational skills (ESOL, digital skills, and literacy) necessary for upward mobility; strengthen Adult Education program infrastructure, including creation of intake and assessment centers; call for development by RIDE of a strategic plan with a needs assessment and equity-informed roadmap; invest one-time ARPA funds as recommended in the Make It Happen report and commit additional general revenue for the long-term. [House 7637 \(Cortvriend\)](#) / [Senate 2437 \(Seveney\)](#)

\* [Rhode Island Workforce Alliance](#)

- **Improve access to early education and childcare assistance & strengthen the early childhood education workforce**

The RI Early Educator Investment Act would develop goals and strategies to increase wages for early educators in childcare, Early Intervention, family home visiting, and Pre-K programs. [House 7283 \(Casimiro\)](#) / [Senate 2235 \(Cano\)](#)

The RI Child Care is Essential Act increases the income limit for CCAP from 180% to 266% FPL (\$41,454 to \$61,220 for a family of 3) and raises provider rates for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), increasing access to high-quality and safe childcare options. [House 7177 \(Diaz\)](#) / [Senate 2681 \(Cano\)](#)

Increase provider payment rates for Early Intervention and First Connections programs. [House 7628 \(Giraldo\)](#) / [Senate 2546 \(Valverde\)](#)

\* [Right from the Start Coalition](#)

- **Expand and modify Temporary Caregiver Insurance (TCI) and Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) programs**

Increase TCI maximum benefit from 4 to 12 weeks and expand the program to cover care for siblings, grandchildren, and other care recipients. For TCI/TDI increase the taxable wage base for employers paying into program; increase benefit for lower-wage workers and create tax credit for low-wage tax filers who paid into fund but did not receive benefits; allow self-employed individuals to opt into system. [House 7444 \(Cassar\)](#)

\* [Right from the Start Coalition](#)

- **Extend family and medical leave options for caregivers**

Extend parental/family leave from 13 weeks to 24 (S-2243) or 26 (H-7717) weeks in any two-calendar year period. [House 7717 \(Giraldo\)](#) / [Senate 2243 \(Cano\)](#)

\* [Right from the Start Coalition](#)

- **Phase out the tipped minimum wage**

Phase out the cash or tipped minimum wage by 2028, raising it each year from its current \$3.89 per hour. [House 7348 \(Felix\)](#)

- **Further increase the minimum wage**

Put Rhode Island on a path to a \$19/hr minimum wage by January 2025, with yearly increases replacing the current pathway to \$15/hr in that year. This is still below where the minimum wage would be had it kept pace with productivity over the last half-century. This bill would also eliminate immediately the tipped minimum wage. [House 7765 \(Henries\)](#) / [Senate 2241 \(Calkin\)](#)

- **Make cannabis legalization equitable for those harmed by the war on drugs**

Ensure that the legalization of cannabis for adult recreational use mandates the automatic expungement of relevant criminal records and provides opportunities for individuals and communities disproportionately harmed by the war on drugs to participate in this new venture.

\* [Yes We Cannabis RI Coalition](#)

- **End predatory/payday lending**

Repeal statute that permits payday lenders to charge effective APR of 260% and drives people into cycle of debt. [House 7534 \(Barros\)](#) / [Senate 2166 \(Quezada\)](#)

\* [Payday Lending Reform Coalition](#)

- **Reform court fines and fees imposed by the courts on low-income defendants in criminal cases**

These bills, in various ways, reduce or eliminate the burden of fines, fees, and costs imposed by the courts on low-income defendants in criminal cases. [House 7084](#), [House 7141](#), [House 7192](#), [House 7695 \(Knight\)](#)

## TAX, BUDGET, AND REVENUE FAIRNESS AND EQUITY

to raise revenue fairly and invest wisely in recovery

- **Raise revenue to invest in Rhode Island's future by creating a new tax bracket for the top 1%**

Raise an estimated \$144.5 million in annual revenue by adding an 8.99% Personal Income Tax bracket affecting approximately 5,000 tax filers and only their Adjusted Gross Income above \$500,000. [House 7440 \(Alzate\)](#) / [Senate 2264 \(Murray\)](#)

\* [Revenue for RI Coalition](#)

- **Increase capital gains taxes and a tax on non-owner occupied second homes**

Increase taxes on capital gains and institute a tax on non-owner-occupied second homes. [House 7865 \(Ajello\)](#) / [Senate \(Kallman\)](#)

- **Increase the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**

Raise the state EITC above the current 15% of the federal credit to allow working families to keep more of their earnings. [House 7494 \(O'Brien\)](#) / [Senate 2062 \(Felag\)](#)

\* [RI EITC Coalition](#)

- **Ensure that American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds are used as part of a coordinated plan to make immediate & long-term investments to meet critical needs.**

Work to ensure that ARPA State Fiscal Recovery Funds are spent in a well-planned way to invest in a sustained and equitable recovery, advance the proposals recommended in the [Rhode Island Foundation's Make it Happen Report](#) to invest in housing, behavioral health, workforce development, small businesses, and neighborhood trusts.

(Example) Investment in Housing: House 7123, Article 1 Section 16 (Abney) appropriates \$250M for affordable housing over the lifetime of the ARPA funds. EPI and [Rhode Island Foundation's Make it Happen Report](#) recommend significantly more appropriation of the ARPA funds to address the crisis of affordable housing. The Report proposes prioritizing investments to remedy historic inequities and enable historically marginalized populations and those that have suffered disproportionately from COVID-19 to have safe, affordable homes.

\* [Homes RI](#)

## EQUITY FOR IMMIGRANTS

to extend security and opportunity to all Rhode Islanders

- **Driver's licenses for all Rhode Islanders, regardless of immigration status**

Provide a means for Rhode Islanders without lawful presence in the US to obtain an alternative driving license. [House 7708 \(Williams\)](#) / [Senate 2006 \(Cicccone\)](#)

\* [The Immigrant Coalition of Rhode Island](#)

\*Note: See information for coverage for all children and 12-month postpartum coverage regardless of immigration status under **Equity in Healthcare**.

## EQUITY IN HEALTHCARE

to protect the health of all Rhode Islanders

- **Codify Affordable Care Act (ACA) health insurance consumer protections in state law**

The omnibus bill [H7500 \(Cassar\)](#) includes all the protections called for in the following three bills:

- Prohibits discrimination based on pre-existing conditions; prohibits patient cost-sharing for primary and preventive healthcare services; requires insurers to provide coverage for 10 types of essential benefits identified in the ACA. [House 7560 \(Speakman\)](#) / [Senate 2080 \(Miller\)](#)
- Prohibit insurers from capping annual or lifetime coverage for essential benefits. [House 7183 \(Kislak\)](#) / [Senate \(Goodwin\)](#)
- Require insurers to provide coverage for contraceptive care. [House 7631 \(Kazarian\)](#) / [Senate 2327 \(Euer\)](#)

\* [Protect Our Healthcare Coalition](#)

- **Extend Medicaid coverage from 60 days to 12-months postpartum for all women who are enrolled in Medicaid when they give birth**

Provide Medicaid coverage for women (regardless of immigration status) who gave birth while enrolled in Medicaid through the end of the 12th month postpartum [House 7290 \(Williams\)](#) / [Senate 2202 \(Goodwin\)](#)

\* [Right from the Start Coalition](#)

- **Provide Rite Care health insurance for children regardless of immigration status**

Provide Rite Care health insurance coverage for income-eligible children regardless of immigration status, including those who are undocumented. [House 7445 \(Morales\)](#) / [Senate 2196 \(Cano\)](#)

\* [Right from the Start Coalition](#)

- **Create equity in abortion coverage**

The Equality in Abortion Act requires coverage of abortions under the state's Medicaid program and in state employee insurance plans. [House 7442 \(Cassar\)](#) / [Senate 2549 \(Valverde\)](#)

\* [Rhode Island Coalition for Reproductive Freedom, The Womxn Project](#)

- **Increase Medicare Savings Program income limits**

Eliminate the asset test and increase the income eligibility limits for the Medicare Savings Programs (MSP) that cover the cost of the monthly Part B premium – saving seniors and people with disabilities over \$2,000/year. For the lowest-income individuals, MSP also covers co-pays and deductibles. The bill would increase the monthly income limit for the lowest-income populations from \$1,153 to \$2,115. [House 7445 \(Alzate\)](#) / [Senate 2196 \(Cano\)](#)

\* [Voices for Better Health](#)

- **Maintain and expand investments in Home & Community Based Services (HCBS), including increased wages for healthcare workers**

Expand HCBS options for consumers by increasing wages for direct care workers. Remove the FY2023 budget proposal which seeks an exemption from the requirement of Medicaid's Perry-Sullivan provision to use nursing home savings for HCBS and thereby reduces HCBS funding by close to \$40 million for FY2023. [Senate Resolution S2648 \(DiPalma\)](#) / [House Resolution \(Slater\)](#)

\* [Voices for Better Health](#)

## DEMOCRACY AND EQUITY IN ACTION

to make room for broader participation in the political and legislative processes

- **Let RI Vote by removing barriers and expanding access for voters**

Make voting by mail easier, including allowing a request for a mail ballot without needing a special reason. [House 7100 \(Kazarian\)](#) / [Senate 2007 \(Euer\)](#)

- **Allow for timely voter registration**

Joint Resolution calling for a vote on an amendment to the Rhode Island Constitution to eliminate the rule that voter registration must be completed at least 30 days prior to an election. [House 7225 \(Biah\)](#) / [Senate 2216 \(DiMario\)](#)

\* [Let RI Vote campaign](#)

- **Require equity impact analysis and statements for legislative proposals**

Institute requirement for proposed legislation to include statements concerning whether the legislation will likely increase or decrease racial, ethnic, gender, and disability equity and disparities. [House 7736 \(Cassar\)](#)