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EPI Celebrates 10th Annual Policy and Budget Conference
Focus on meeting the needs of lower-skilled adults in the public
workforce development system

Providence, RI—Today the Economic Progress Institute celebrated its 10th annual policy and budget conference entitled *Budget Rhode Map: Paving the Way to Good Jobs*. Each year, the Institute hosts a half-day conference to educate policymakers, community leaders, and interested residents about critical policy challenges and opportunities facing Rhode Island. This year's conference focused on strategies that improve the skills of Rhode Island's workforce, especially for adults with lower skills and English language needs. Executive Director Rachel Flum and Board Chair Lisa Roth Blackman welcomed participants. Governor Raimondo's Chief of Staff Brett Smiley and Senate Finance Chairman William Conley gave opening remarks.

The keynote speaker this year was Andy Van Kleunen, Chief Executive Officer and founder of National Skills Coalition, a national coalition of business, labor, higher education, and community organization leaders who have come together to advocate for an America that grows its economy by investing in its people. Mr. Van Kleunen is a recognized expert on workforce and education policy issues and is regularly invited to advise Congress, the federal government and state agencies.

"The barriers to success that hold back low-income Rhode Islanders are very real, and in some cases are even tougher here than in other neighboring states. But the commitment in this state to confront those challenges is very real as well. Your call to invest in the skills of every Rhode Islander, regardless of their income or background, is a vitally important step in that process," commented Mr. Van Kleunen

The conference included a panel of state agency leaders and a community leaders panel. Postsecondary Commissioner Brenda Dann-Messier, Department of Human Services Director Courtney Hawkins, Governor's Workforce Board Director Heather Hudson, and RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Ken Wagner comprised the state agency panel. The community panel included Progreso Latino Executive Director Mario Bueno; Genesis Center Executive Director Shannon Carroll; Education Exchange Executive Director Cameron Ennis; Katiria Perez, a graduate of the Genesis Center Medical Assistant program; and Providence Community Health Centers Human Resources Operations Director Jacqueline Scungio.

Panelists discussed access to workforce development services and funding, innovative initiatives, barriers to meeting workforce needs, coordination across agencies, community engagement in policy-making for workforce development and recommendations for improving the workforce system to meet the needs of workers and employers, among other topics.

“We are fortunate here in Rhode Island to have creative leaders in state government, the workforce skills provider community and businesses, as well as hard-working adults who are dedicated to improving their skills, said Rachel Flum, executive director of the Economic Progress Institute. “A high quality and well-funded workforce development system that provides pathways to family-sustaining jobs for all Rhode Islanders – including people with limited English language or literacy skills – is vital to our state’s economic success.”

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About The Economic Progress Institute

The Economic Progress Institute is a nonpartisan research and policy organization dedicated to improving the economic well-being of low- and modest-income Rhode Islanders. For more information visit www.economicprogressri.org.