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Contact

Juan Espinoza, Communications Associate

jespinoza@economicprogressri.org

401-456-2752 (office) 813-526-3043 (cell)

Latest Census Numbers Highlight Barriers to Prosperity for Many Rhode Islanders, Especially Rhode Islanders of Color

Lawmakers can break down barriers to opportunity by raising Rhode Island’s minimum wage to \$15

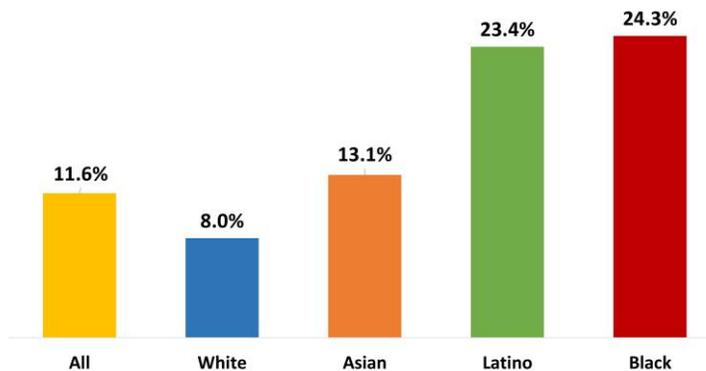
Providence, RI [September 13, 2018]—Rhode Island’s overall poverty rate in 2017 continued to be the highest in New England with more than one in nine (11.6%) Rhode Islanders struggling to afford basic necessities, according to new data released today by the US Census Bureau. The poverty level for a single adult was \$12,140/year in 2017 and \$24,600 for a family of 4. While Rhode Island’s rate is lower than the national rate of 13.4% it is unacceptable that nearly 120,000 residents live in poverty and one in four residents have income below twice the poverty level, generally considered to be the amount required to meet basic needs. (The 11.6% percent poverty rate for 2017 compares to a 12.8% poverty rate for 2016 although the two rates are not far enough apart to indicate a statistically significant decline).

State	Poverty Rate	Poverty rank among all states (1 = lowest poverty rate)
United States	13.4%	
Rhode Island	11.6%	20
Vermont	11.3%	17
Maine	11.1%	15
Massachusetts	10.5%	10
Connecticut	9.6%	5
New Hampshire	7.7%	1

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-yr data, 2017. Table B17001

“Today, fewer Rhode Islanders are living in poverty but the number of Rhode Islanders struggling economically remains too high and is holding back our economy and hampering our kids’ futures,” said Rachel Flum, executive director of the Economic Progress Institute. “Several policies over the past few

Black and Latino poverty rates triple the rate for non-Hispanic White Rhode Islanders



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-yr data, 2017. Tables B17001, B17001B, B17001H, B17001I, S1703.

years including raises to our state’s minimum wage and to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), along with investments in our Child Care Assistance Program have helped working families make ends meet. We need to continue the momentum by increasing our state’s minimum wage to \$15/hr. and expand the EITC.”

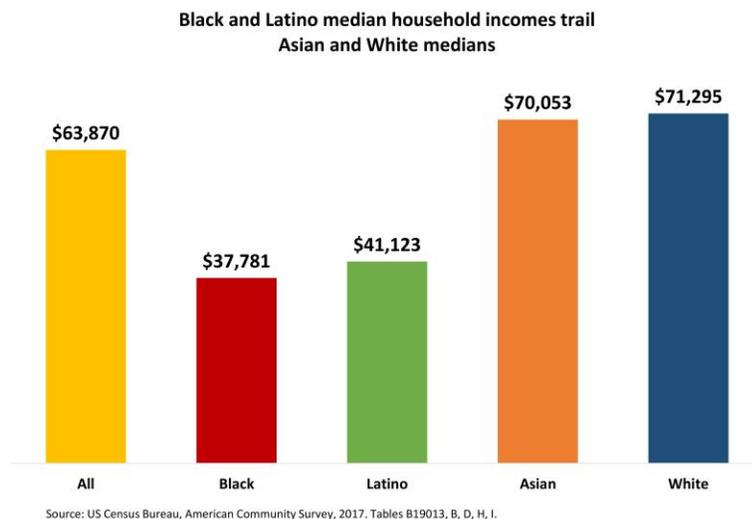
The data also show that Rhode Island’s communities of color were much more likely to live in poverty with poverty rates for Blacks and Latinos three times those of Whites.

Rhode Island’s overall median income (\$63,870) was higher than the national average (\$60,336) as well as the median incomes in Vermont and Maine. While ranking 15th in the nation, we are 4th in New England, trailing Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

New England States	Median Household Income	Rank among all states
United States	\$ 60,336	
Massachusetts	\$ 77,385	4
Connecticut	\$ 74,168	5
New Hampshire	\$ 73,381	6
Rhode Island	\$ 63,870	15
Vermont	\$ 57,513	27
Maine	\$ 56,277	31

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017. Table S1903

The overall median income masks the hurdles faced by communities of color in our state. Latino (\$41,123) and Black (\$37,781) median incomes trail overall median income by a wide margin, while the median income in households headed by non-Hispanic White (\$71,295) and Asian¹ Rhode Islanders (\$70,053) was much higher than the statewide average. One strategy to boost median income for workers of color is to increase the minimum wage, over time, to \$15/hr: over half of Black and Latino workers (51% Black/54% Latino) would benefit from such a wage increase.



“The persistently high rate of poverty among Latinos in our state is very distressing,” said Mario Bueno, executive director of Progreso Latino. “We know the solution to ending economic struggles for Latinos and others: our state must do a better job of ensuring that all children receive quality education in our schools – including a concerted effort to meet the needs of English language learners. We must also continue and expand efforts to provide meaningful educational opportunities for adults

who need to improve their English abilities or other basic workforce skills.”

The Census Bureau also released information on the health insurance status of Americans on Wednesday. The healthcare data is [available online](#).

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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.

¹ The sample size in the American Community Survey is not sufficient to know how sub-populations of the Asian community are faring. We know from other recent studies that Southeast Asian Rhode Islanders normally do not share in the relative prosperity of the overall Asian community.