

## 2022 Legislative Session Wrap-Up

### 10 key ‘wins’ that promote equity and economic security for Rhode Islanders

- 1** **More families eligible for child care assistance; better pay for providers.** The *Right from the Start Campaign*, co-led by EPI, saw significant victories this year: The income limit for eligibility for subsidized child care through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) was raised from 180% FPL to 200% FPL (\$41,454 to \$46,060 for a family of 3) allowing more families to qualify for assistance and the “exit” income limit was raised from 225% FPL to 300% FPL (\$51,817 to \$69,090 for a family of 3) so that families can continue to receive assistance as wages increase. Parents attending a RI public higher education institution are eligible for CCAP, making permanent a pilot program enacted last year. Rates paid to child care providers by the state are increased.
- 2** **Increased economic stability for families receiving RI Works benefits.** The *Raising RI Coalition*, led by EPI, promoted changes to this cash assistance/workforce development program that protects the poorest families. Two changes support parents in gaining skills for obtaining a well-paying job: extending the lifetime limit from 48 to 60 months to give parents more time to develop skills, and permitting parents to attend CCRI for 2 years as their sole activity. Parents working part-time will be able to keep more of their cash assistance benefit to supplement wages with the increase of the earned income disregard to \$300 from \$170/month. The law was also amended to exclude the new and very welcome **State Child Tax Credit** (\$250/child) from counting as income, so that families receiving RI Works will benefit from this payment. Unfortunately, the Coalition’s request to provide a cost-of-living increase and/or increase the benefit was not adopted.
- 3** **Cover all Kids.** All children, regardless of immigration status, will be eligible for RItE Care Health Insurance coverage (as long as they meet other program requirements) and thus have access to quality health care.
- 4** **Post-partum coverage.** RItE Care coverage for women who give birth while enrolled in RItE Care will be extended to 12 months post-partum, an expansion from the current 60-day limit. Since all pregnant women, regardless of immigration status, are eligible for RItE Care, but eligibility for parents is more limited, this extension will improve access to care for both lawfully present and undocumented new parents.
- 5** **Driver’s Licenses for All.** After decades of advocacy by immigrant organizations, and allies from community and religious organizations, Rhode Island residents who do not have legal immigration status will be able to obtain a driver’s privilege card. To be eligible the person must show that they have paid taxes to Rhode Island for at least one year and meet other requirements for obtaining a license. The *Immigrant Coalition*, of which EPI is an active member, spearheaded the initiative. Rhode Island joins 17 other states (including Connecticut and Massachusetts) in permitting individuals without legal immigration status to drive legally.

Investments in Children and Families

Equity in Healthcare

Equity for Immigrants

- 6 New Investments in Adult Education.** The *Workforce Alliance*, co-facilitated by EPI, led a successful campaign to increase funding for the network of 19 adult education providers around the state. State funding was increased for the first time in over 10 years. The additional \$540,000 will be quickly distributed to providers to help meet rising costs. The budget also includes \$5M (\$2M for FY 2023) from the \$1.1B in funds the state is receiving from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). This investment to improve employment opportunities for lower-skilled workers by expanding access to digital literacy skills, “learn and earn” programs, and other best practices was supported by the *Make It Happen* report, an initiative led by The Rhode Island Foundation and for which EPI provided technical assistance.
- 7 Increase Wages for Direct Care Workers.** Wages paid to direct support workers employed by home health agencies and workers hired by individuals through the Independent Provider and Personal Choice programs will be paid a minimum of \$15/hour (up from \$13.25 for Independent Providers, for example). The *Voices for Better Health* partnership (EPI, Senior Agenda, and RI Organizing Project) worked with SEIU and other partners to ensure the funds to support these increases were included in the budget.
- 8 Working to create affordable housing for all and to end homelessness.** The budget appropriates \$250M of ARPA funds for affordable housing, with \$97M to be spent in FY2023 on a range of investments. These include: development of housing for Rhode Islanders at different income levels, including those with very low income; temporary or permanent shelter to address homelessness and services to support people in housing; down-payment assistance; home-repair; and community revitalization. The state agency position devoted to housing/homelessness created in December 2021 will be elevated from deputy secretary of commerce to a cabinet level position reporting directly to the Governor. The investment in affordable housing was a priority for the *Make It Happen* initiative, led by the Rhode Island Foundation in partnership with EPI, RIPEC and a Steering Committee. Homes RI was instrumental in coordinating the housing investment strategy.
- 9 Creating Opportunities and the Decriminalization of Poverty.** Legislation was passed to require (rather than permit) judges to take into consideration the ability of defendants to pay court costs. This will free many indigent defendants from the ongoing burden of additional debt. The bills legalizing cannabis for adult recreational use include strong equity provisions (for which EPI provided analysis and testimony) including the automatic expungement of cannabis possession records and provision of financial and other support for individuals and communities harmed by the war on drugs to participate in this new market.
- 10 Let RI Vote.** EPI was a member of the *Let RI Vote Coalition* which secured passage of the Let RI Vote Act. The Act expands and simplifies the process for voting (securely) by mail and requires municipalities to maintain at least one drop box where voters can deposit ballots through the close of polls on election day.

Improving Workforce Opportunity and  
Income Security

Creating Housing for All

Equity and Criminal  
Justice Reform

Democracy  
in Action