

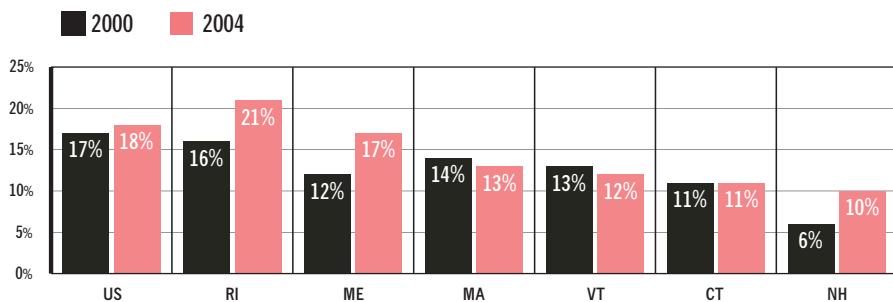
Issue Brief

**CHILD POVERTY IN RHODE ISLAND:  
A STATISTICAL PROFILE**

Children most at risk of not achieving their full potential are children who live in poverty. Children in poverty, especially those in poverty for extended periods of time, are more likely to have health and behavioral problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, earn less as adults and be unemployed more frequently.<sup>1,2</sup> Children in low-income communities are less likely to attend high performing schools with adequate facilities and have fewer opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities after school and on the weekends, such as sports and recreation programs, clubs, and lessons such as music and computers.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

Children of color and children of immigrants are more likely to grow up poor.<sup>6</sup> Single parenthood, low educational attainment, part-time or no employment and low wages of parents place children at risk of being poor.<sup>7</sup>

**CHILDREN IN POVERTY,  
THE U.S. AND NEW ENGLAND, 2000 AND 2004**



- ◆ Between 2000 and 2004 the percentage of children in poverty increased nationally and in three New England states, Rhode Island, Maine and New Hampshire. Massachusetts and Vermont both experienced decreases in the percentage of children living below the poverty threshold, while Connecticut remained constant.
- ◆ The percentage of children in poverty in Rhode Island increased from 16% in 2000 to 21% in 2004. Rhode Island has the highest rate of childhood poverty in New England. In 2004 there were 50,390 children living below the poverty threshold in Rhode Island.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2004. Selected Economic Characteristics.



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: RHODE ISLAND CHILDHOOD POVERTY

*Q. How many children are there in Rhode Island, and of that total number, how many are living in poverty?*

A. According to the 2004 American Community Survey, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 239,432 children under the age of 18 in Rhode Island. Of these, 21% (50,390) lived below the federal poverty threshold.<sup>8</sup>

*Q. How does Rhode Island's child poverty rate compare to the child poverty rate in the nation and in New England?*

A. Rhode Island's childhood poverty rate of 21% ranks 38th in the nation (1st is best and 50th is worst). Rhode Island has the highest child poverty rate of the six New England states.<sup>9</sup>

*Q. Are young children more likely to be poor?*

A. Both nationally, and in Rhode Island, young children from birth through age five are more likely to be poor. In 2004, 23% (16,326) of Rhode Island children under age 6 lived below the poverty threshold, compared to 21% nationally.<sup>10</sup> Research shows that increased exposure to poverty effects children's emotional and intellectual development.<sup>11</sup>

*Q. What is extreme poverty and how many Rhode Island children are considered extremely poor?*

A. Families with income below 50% of the federal poverty threshold are considered to be living in extreme poverty. Of the 50,390 children living below the poverty threshold in Rhode Island, more than half (54%) lived in extreme poverty. In total, 11% (27,426) of all children in Rhode Island lived in extreme poverty.<sup>12</sup>

*Q. What is the federal poverty threshold and how is it measured?*

A. The official federal poverty threshold in 2004 for a family of three with two children is \$15,219, while the poverty threshold for a family of four with two children is \$19,157. The extreme poverty level in 2004 was family income below \$7,610 for a family of three with two children and \$9,579 for a family of four with two children.<sup>13</sup> The official poverty threshold was set by the federal government in 1963, and was based on the cost of a minimum diet for a family

of four. The cost of food was multiplied by three, since at that time about one-third of the after-tax expenditures of families was spent on food. The poverty threshold is adjusted annually according to the increase in the Consumer Price Index.

*Q. Do Rhode Island's poor children live in the urban areas or throughout the state?*

A. According to the 2000 Census, three-quarters (75%) of Rhode Island's poor children lived in one of the six core cities, those cities with a child poverty rate of 15% or more. In 2000, Providence had the third highest child poverty rate (41%) in the country among cities with a population of 100,000 or more. (Hartford, CT is first, Brownsville, TX is second and New Orleans, LA is tied with Providence for 3rd poorest.)<sup>14</sup>

*Q. What is the racial and ethnic breakdown of Rhode Island's poor children?*

A. Nearly half (49%) of Rhode Island's poor children are white, yet Hispanic, Black and Asian children are much more likely to be living in poverty. In Rhode Island, 52% of Hispanic children, 48% of Black children and 38% of Asian children lived in poverty, compared to 13% of White children.<sup>15</sup>

*Q. Do most poor children live in single-parent families?*

A. Family structure continues to be strongly related to whether or not children grow up in poor households. Children in single-parent families are six times more likely than children in two-parent families to be living in poverty. In 2004, 4 out of 5 of Rhode Island's poor children lived in single female-headed households; 5% lived in single male-headed households and 14% lived in two-parent families.<sup>16</sup>

*Q. Does a parent having less than a high school diploma increase the risk that children will grow up poor?*

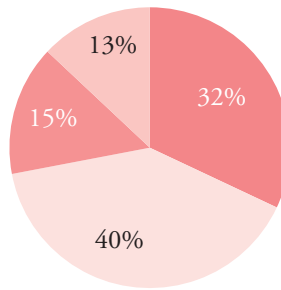
A. Poverty results from low wages and/or lack of stable employment. The educational attainment of the parent(s) is an important factor. In Rhode Island, families with less than a high school diploma are three times more likely to be poor than those with a high school degree or above.<sup>18</sup>

## RHODE ISLAND'S POOR CHILDREN, 2004

### BY AGE

- 32% ■ Ages 5 and younger
- 40% ■ Ages 6 to 11
- 15% ■ Ages 12 to 14
- 13% ■ Ages 15 to 17

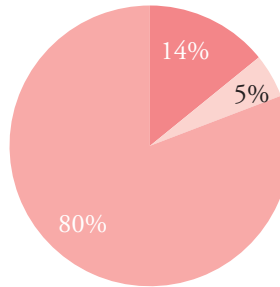
*n* = 50,390



### BY FAMILY STRUCTURE\*

- 14% ■ Married Couple Family
- 5% ■ Male Householder only
- 80% ■ Female Householder only

*n* = 49,446

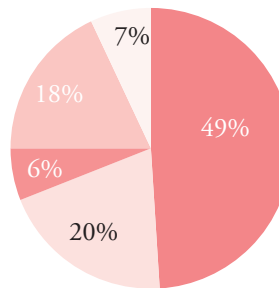


\*Only includes related children living in households.

### BY RACE\*\*

- 49% ■ White
- 20% ■ Black
- 6% ■ Asian
- 18% ■ Some other race
- 7% ■ Two or more races

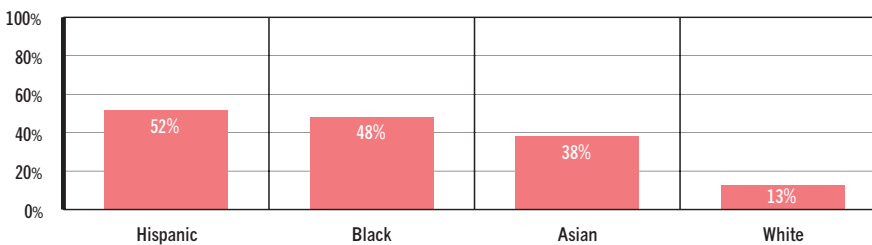
*n* = 48,689



\*\* Hispanic children may be included in any race category. Of Rhode Island's poor children, 43% are Hispanic.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2004. Except where otherwise noted, population includes related and unrelated children living in households for whom poverty status was determined.

## CHILDREN IN POVERTY BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, RHODE ISLAND, 2004



In Rhode Island in 2004, 52% of Hispanic children, 48% of Black children and 38% of Asian children lived in poverty, compared to 13% of White children.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2004.

## RHODE ISLAND CHILDREN LIVING BELOW POVERTY, 2000

CITY/TOWN	% OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18 IN POVERTY
Barrington	2.7%
Bristol	10.0%
Burrillville	6.0%
Central Falls*	40.9%
Charlestown	4.7%
Coventry	5.9%
Cranston	9.1%
Cumberland	3.1%
East Greenwich	4.1%
East Providence	10.8%
Exeter	7.5%
Foster	2.9%
Glocester	6.7%
Hopkinton	5.9%
Jamestown	1.4%
Johnston	9.0%
Lincoln	6.5%
Little Compton	1.0%
Middletown	6.2%
Narragansett	8.6%
New Shoreham	10.2%
Newport*	24.4%
North Kingstown	9.7%
North Providence	10.1%
North Smithfield	3.0%
Pawtucket*	25.3%
Portsmouth	2.8%
Providence*	40.5%
Richmond	4.2%
Scituate	4.3%
Smithfield	3.9%
South Kingstown	5.3%
Tiverton	2.8%
Warren	8.4%
Warwick	6.7%
West Greenwich	2.7%
West Warwick*	18.1%
Westerly	10.0%
Woonsocket*	31.8%
<b>Core Cities</b>	<b>33.9%</b>
<b>Remainder of State</b>	<b>6.8%</b>
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>16.9%</b>

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000. City and Town data are only available from the 2000 Decennial Census.

\* Core city with 15% or more of children living in poverty.

As of 2004, 21% (50,390) of children were living below the federal poverty threshold in Rhode Island.

## FAMILY INCOME LEVELS BASED ON THE FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES

The federal poverty threshold, as outlined above, is used by the Census Bureau to calculate all official poverty population statistics. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) uses a slightly different measure, called the Poverty Guidelines. The Federal Poverty Guidelines are a simplified version of the federal poverty thresholds and are used for administrative purposes, such as determining financial eligibility for certain federal programs. In 2005 the poverty guidelines were \$16,090 for a family of three. Many government assistance programs for low-income people now use income eligibility limits that are above the federal poverty guidelines to help families meet their basic needs. For example, families of three earning \$20,917 per year (130% of the federal poverty guidelines) qualify for the Food Stamp Program, families earning up to \$36,203 qualify for child care subsidies, and families earning up to \$40,225 qualify for RIte Care. These figures are adjusted upward for larger families.

2005 FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES	ANNUAL INCOME FAMILY OF THREE	ANNUAL INCOME FAMILY OF FOUR
50%	\$ 8,045	\$ 9,675
100%	\$16,090	\$19,350
130%	\$20,917	\$25,155
185%	\$29,767	\$35,798
200%	\$32,180	\$38,700
225%	\$36,203	\$43,538
250%	\$40,225	\$48,375

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2005). *2005 Federal Poverty Guidelines*. Federal Register, 70(33), 8373-8375.

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- <sup>8,9,10,15,16,17</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2004.
- <sup>11</sup> National Center for Children in Poverty. (March 2002). *Early childhood poverty: A statistical profile*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health.
- <sup>13</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Thresholds for 2004 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years. Retrieved February 2004 from www.census.gov.
- <sup>14</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a children's policy organization that provides information on child well-being, stimulates dialogue on children's issues, and promotes accountability and action. Primary funding for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is provided by The Rhode Island Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the United Way of Rhode Island, Prince Charitable Trusts, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, CVS Charitable Trust, Ocean State Charities Trust, Hasbro Charitable Trust and other corporate, foundation and individual sponsors.

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