

# Children in Families Receiving Cash Assistance

## DEFINITION

*Children in families receiving cash assistance* is the percentage of children under age 18 who were living in families receiving cash assistance through the Rhode Island Works Program (RI Works). These data measure the number of children and families enrolled in RI Works at a single point in time. Children and families who participated in the program at other points in the year but who were not enrolled on that day are not included.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The goal of the Rhode Island Works Program (RI Works) is to help very low-income families meet their basic needs by providing cash assistance and work supports, including employment services, SNAP benefits, health insurance, and subsidized child care. Children and families qualify for cash assistance based on their income, resources, and the number of people in their families.<sup>1</sup>

RI Works cash assistance recipients must participate in an employment plan unless they meet specific criteria for an exemption. This employment plan must take into account the parent's skills, education, and family responsibilities as well as local employment opportunities and should outline a process for helping the parent meet his or her employment goals. Parents should be informed about

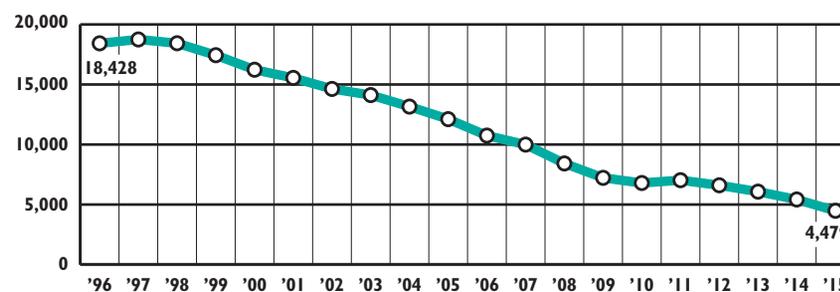
opportunities to seek additional education or training to improve their employability prospects.<sup>2</sup>

RI Works provides a safety net for some children whose parents are unable to work due to a disability and can function as an unemployment system for parents who do not have sufficient earnings or work experience to qualify for unemployment benefits. RI Works also provides time-limited supplementary cash assistance to very low-income working families.<sup>3</sup> In December 2015, the average hourly wage of working parents enrolled in RI Works was \$10.19 per hour.<sup>4</sup>

RI Works connects families to the Office of Child Support Services, which assists families in establishing paternity (when applicable), identifying and locating non-custodial parents, and obtaining child support payments from non-custodial parents.<sup>5</sup> In Rhode Island, the first \$50 of child support paid on time each month on behalf of a child enrolled in RI Works goes to the custodial parent caring for the child. The balance is shared by the state and federal governments as reimbursement for assistance received through RI Works.<sup>6,7</sup>

The maximum monthly RI Works benefit for a family of three is \$554 per month.<sup>8</sup> Families receiving the maximum monthly cash benefit have incomes that are less than one-half the federal poverty level and are living in extreme poverty.<sup>9</sup>

Cash Assistance Caseload, Rhode Island, 1996-2015\*



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, December 1, 1996-2015. Cases can be child-only or whole families and multiple people can be included in one case. \*The Rhode Island Department of Human Services changed the method for calculating the caseload data starting in the 2012 Factbook. This change is reflected in 2010-2015 caseload data. Comparisons to earlier years should be made with caution.

- ◆ Since 1996, when the program began, the Rhode Island cash assistance caseload had been steadily declining. Between 2014 and 2015, the caseload decreased by 17%, from 5,422 to 4,479 families.<sup>10</sup>
- ◆ The RI Works caseload has declined due to policies implemented in 2008, when the program changed from the Family Independence Program (FIP) to RI Works. These policies included new time limits (a 48-month lifetime limit for benefits and a periodic time limit that limits assistance to no more than 24 months of assistance in any 60-month period), closing child-only cases when parents reach their time limit, and limiting eligibility for legal permanent residents to those who have had that status for five years.<sup>11</sup>
- ◆ From December 2006 to 2014, the RI Works caseload decreased by 56%, while the number of unemployed people in Rhode Island increased by 36%.<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ In December 2015, there were 2,967 adults and 7,675 children under age 18 enrolled in RI Works. More than two-thirds (72%) of RI Works beneficiaries were children, and 43% of the children enrolled in RI Works were under the age of six.<sup>13</sup>
- ◆ Continued high unemployment, particularly for adults with limited education, coupled with shorter time limits for cash assistance leaves many families with children experiencing deep poverty, hardship, and homelessness. In 2014, 19,151 children in Rhode Island lived in extreme poverty, yet only 7,675 received cash assistance in 2015.<sup>14,15</sup>

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## RI Works Policies

### Work Requirements

◆ Single-parent families must participate in a work activity for a minimum of 20 hours per week if they have a child under age six and a minimum of 30 hours per week if their youngest child is age six or older. For two-parent families, one or both parents must participate in work activities for an individual or combined total of 35 hours per week.<sup>16</sup>

### Time Limits

◆ The lifetime limit for RI Works is 48 months. Families also are limited to no more than 24 months of cash assistance in a 60-month period. All cash assistance issued in Rhode Island or any other state since May 1, 1997 counts toward the lifetime limit, while assistance received since July 1, 2008 counts toward the 24-month periodic time limit.<sup>17</sup>

### Hardship Extensions

◆ Families can apply for hardship extensions that allow them to continue receiving cash assistance after reaching the time limit if the parent has a documented significant disability, is caring for a significantly disabled family member, is unable to pursue employment due to domestic violence, is homeless, or is unable to work because of “a critical other condition or circumstance.” While parents must submit requests for hardship extensions (initially for six months, and then for three-month extensions), there is no limit on the total time a family can receive a hardship extension.<sup>18,19</sup>

### Child-Only Cases

◆ Child-only cases are those that receive assistance for only the children in the family because the child’s parent is ineligible. Child-only cases include children living with a non-parent or a parent who is disabled and receiving Supplemental Security Income.<sup>20</sup>

### Sanctions

◆ If a parent misses a required appointment, refuses or quits a job, or in some other way fails to comply with an employment plan and is not able to establish “good cause” (e.g., lack of child care, illness, a family crisis or other allowed circumstance), the family’s cash benefit is reduced. If benefits are reduced for a total of three months (consecutive or not) due to non-compliance, the family’s case is closed and the entire family loses the RI Works benefit. Benefits can be restored in the month after the parent reapplies and comes into compliance.<sup>21</sup>

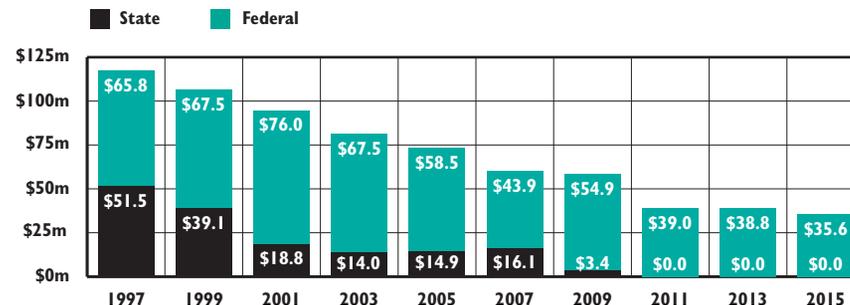
## RI Works by Case Type, 2015

	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Child-only cases	1,757	39%
Cases with adults required to engage in a work activity	2,722	61%
Cases with adults exempt from a work activity*	397	9%
<b>Total RI Works Caseload</b>	<b>4,479</b>	

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, 2015.

\*RI Works regulations require that all parents and caretaker relatives included in the cash assistance grant participate in a work activity unless they receive a temporary exemption. Exemptions from work activities include: youngest child under age one (240), in third trimester of pregnancy (109), caring for a disabled spouse or child (22), being a victim of domestic violence (26), or being a recipient of SSI/SSDI or determined to be eligible for SSI/SSDI (0). Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

## Rhode Island Cash Assistance Expenditures, State Fiscal Years 1997-2015



Sources: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, *Family Independence Program 2007 annual report*. (FY 1997-2001); House Fiscal Advisory Staff. (2004-2015). Budget as enacted: Fiscal Years 2005-2016. (FY 2003-2015). Fiscal years 1997-2013 are funds spent and FY 2015 is final budget.

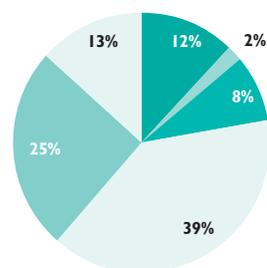
◆ In State Fiscal Year 2015, for the sixth year in a row, no state general revenue was allocated for cash assistance. State general revenue spending for cash assistance has decreased steadily over the past 18 years. The cash assistance program is now entirely supported by federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant funds. The total expenditures for cash assistance in Rhode Island (federal and state) decreased by 72% between 1996 (when the program began) and 2015, from \$126.5 million to \$35.6 million.<sup>22,23</sup>

# Children in Families Receiving Cash Assistance

## Activities of Families Enrolled in the RI Works Program, December 2015

### By Type of Activity

12% (333)	Employed
2% (63)	Work Experience
8% (220)	Education/Training
39% (1,066)	Job Search/Job Readiness
25% (673)	Assessment/Transition
13% (367)	Sanctioned



*n*=2,722

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, December 2015. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

◆ As of December 2015, 12% of families that were required to engage in work-related activities were employed, down from 38% in December 2007, when the recession began. An additional 2% were in unpaid work experience.<sup>24,25</sup> Work experience can help parents gain new skills, knowledge, and work habits to improve their employability.<sup>26</sup>

◆ Parents with very limited literacy or English-language skills can participate in basic education and work skills programs. Parents also can receive up to one year of vocational education as part of their 48-month lifetime limit.<sup>27</sup> As of December 2015, 8% of families were participating in education or training programs.<sup>28</sup>

◆ Over one-third (39%) of families were participating in job search/job readiness activities, including job search and job skills development programs delivered in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, primarily through their netWORKri one-stop career center locations, and vocational rehabilitation services delivered by the Office of Rehabilitation Services. Twenty-five percent of families were in assessment or transition, which includes preparing an employment plan, receiving educational or vocational assessments, or waiting to begin an education program or job.<sup>29,30</sup>

◆ Thirteen percent of families required to engage in a work-related activity were sanctioned, meaning they lost benefits due to non-compliance with their employment plan.<sup>31</sup>

## Support for Young Parents

◆ A child is nine times more likely to grow up in poverty if that child's mother gave birth as a teen, the parents were unmarried when the child was born, and the mother did not receive a high school diploma or GED.<sup>32</sup>

◆ RI Works provides additional support to young parents. Parents who are under age 20 and do not have a high school diploma or GED receive mandatory parenting skills training and are supported in completing their high school education while enrolled in RI Works. In addition, pregnant or parenting teens under age 18 are required to live with their parent, legal guardian, or adult relative or in an adult-supervised setting if it is not possible to live at home.<sup>33</sup>

◆ In December 2015, there were 168 families with a head of household under the age of 20 enrolled in RI Works, representing 4% of the total caseload.<sup>34</sup>

## Support for Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families

◆ Nationally, more than one-quarter (27%) of cash assistance recipients have a physical, mental, or emotional problem that keeps them from working or limits the type or amount of work they can do, compared to 6% of all low-income single mothers.<sup>35</sup>

◆ Under RI Works, parents with disabilities may be exempt from work requirements only if they are receiving SSI or SSDI or determined to be eligible for SSI or SSDI. Other parents with disabilities are referred to the Office of Rehabilitation Services for further assessment, vocational rehabilitation services, and help applying for SSI.<sup>36</sup>

◆ As of December 1, 2015, 776 families (17% of the total RI Works caseload) had hardship extensions, 197 for a physical or mental disability, 16 to care for a disabled family member, seven who were unable to work due to a domestic violence situation, seven due to homelessness, and 549 because of another critical condition or circumstance.<sup>37</sup> Nationally, many families leave cash assistance not because they find work, but because they reach their time limit or are sanctioned. These families often have barriers to employment, such as a mental or physical impairment, or a child with a disability.<sup>38</sup>

# Children in Families Receiving Cash Assistance

Table 11. Children in Families Receiving Cash Assistance (RI Works), Rhode Island, December 1, 2015

CITY/TOWN	# OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18	NUMBER RECEIVING CASH ASSISTANCE		% OF CHILDREN RECEIVING CASH ASSISTANCE
		FAMILIES	CHILDREN	
Barrington	4,597	6	8	<1%
Bristol	3,623	25	34	1%
Burrillville	3,576	23	33	1%
Central Falls	5,644	236	414	7%
Charlestown	1,506	4	4	<1%
Coventry	7,770	56	98	1%
Cranston	16,414	230	369	2%
Cumberland	7,535	47	87	1%
East Greenwich	3,436	21	34	1%
East Providence	9,177	114	168	2%
Exeter	1,334	5	10	1%
Foster	986	5	6	1%
Glocester	2,098	4	5	<1%
Hopkinton	1,845	5	7	<1%
Jamestown	1,043	4	8	<1%
Johnston	5,480	56	83	2%
Lincoln	4,751	34	52	1%
Little Compton	654	3	4	1%
Middletown	3,652	38	56	2%
Narragansett	2,269	13	22	1%
New Shoreham	163	0	0	0%
Newport	4,083	142	248	6%
North Kingstown	6,322	33	54	1%
North Providence	5,514	81	127	2%
North Smithfield	2,456	16	29	1%
Pawtucket	16,575	471	761	5%
Portsmouth	3,996	19	26	1%
Providence	41,634	1,805	3,331	8%
Richmond	1,849	10	13	1%
Scituate	2,272	9	13	1%
Smithfield	3,625	4	5	<1%
South Kingstown	5,416	21	25	<1%
Tiverton	2,998	36	64	2%
Warren	1,940	18	28	1%
Warwick	15,825	239	336	2%
West Greenwich	1,477	3	4	<1%
West Warwick	5,746	146	236	4%
Westerly	4,787	38	57	1%
Woonsocket	9,888	443	790	8%
Other/Unknown	NA	16	26	NA
Four Core Cities	73,741	2,955	5,296	7%
Remainder of State	150,215	1,508	2,353	2%
Rhode Island	223,956	4,479	7,675	3%

## Education and Training Supporting Employment

- ◆ An estimated 150,000 working-age adults (ages 16 or older) in Rhode Island are not enrolled in school and have no high school diploma or have limited English-language skills. Many face both of these obstacles to success in the labor market.<sup>39</sup>
- ◆ Projections suggest that adults who drop out of high school will qualify for only 12% of jobs in 2020, while 65% of jobs in the U.S. will require postsecondary education, up from 28% in 1973.<sup>40</sup> Between 2010 and 2014, the unemployment rate for Rhode Islanders without high school diplomas was 15.8%, compared to 11.6% for those with high school degrees and 4.1% for those with a Bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>41</sup>
- ◆ Parents enrolled in RI Works face significant barriers to success in the labor market. Thirty-nine percent of parents enrolled in RI Works report not finishing high school.<sup>42</sup> Among a recently tested group of parents receiving cash assistance, more than one-third (37%) of those tested in English tested at or below the sixth-grade reading level, while two-thirds (67%) of native Spanish speakers enrolled in RI Works tested at or below the sixth-grade reading level on a Spanish-language version of the test.<sup>43</sup>
- ◆ Research comparing mandatory job-search-first and mandatory education-or-training-first programs has found that the most effective approach is a mixed strategy where beneficiaries are encouraged to look for and take full-time jobs that pay above the minimum wage, offer benefits, have the potential for advancement, and also are offered high-quality, work-focused, and short-term education or training to improve their employability.<sup>44</sup> States should explore how to meet their work participation rate while offering beneficiaries a chance to improve job skills and long-term work preparedness.<sup>45</sup>

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, December 2015. The Rhode Island Department of Human Services changed the method for calculating the caseload and persons receiving cash assistance starting in the 2012 Factbook. Comparisons to data presented in previous Factbooks should be made with caution.

The denominator is the total number of children under age 18 from U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010, Summary File 1.

Communities may have more families than children receiving cash assistance because a pregnant woman without children is eligible if in the final trimester of her pregnancy.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

### References

<sup>1,2,3,5,8,16,17,18,20,21,26,30,33,36</sup> Rhode Island Department of Human Services. (2016). *Rhode Island Department of Human Services Code of Rules: RI Works Program (Policy #1400)*. Retrieved February 24, 2016, from [www.policy.dhs.ri.gov](http://www.policy.dhs.ri.gov)

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