

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 during the month of December. Children and families who participated in the program at other points in the year but who were not enrolled in that month are not included.

SIGNIFICANCE

The goal of 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, subsidized child care, and a small annual clothing allowance for children. Children and families qualify for cash assistance based on their income, resources, and the number of people in their families.¹

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

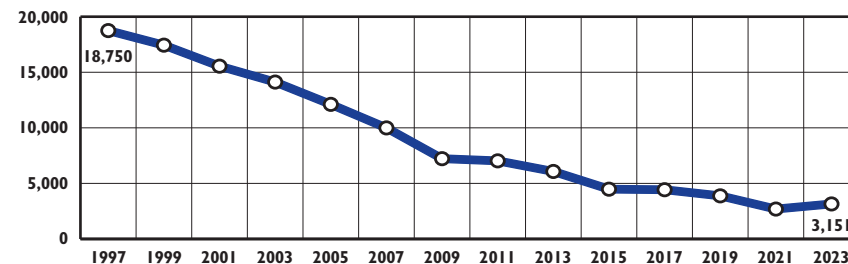
opportunities to seek additional education or training to improve their employability prospects.²

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 with insufficient earnings or work experience to qualify for unemployment benefits.³ In 2023, the average hourly wage of working parents enrolled in RI Works was \$17.46 per hour.⁴

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.⁵ 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 kept by the state and federal governments as reimbursement for assistance received through RI Works.^{6,7}

The maximum monthly RI Works benefits for a family of three is \$721 per month.⁸ Benefits were increased by 30% in 2021, the first increase in 30 years, but the maximum benefit is still only 30% of the federal poverty threshold.^{9,10}

Cash Assistance Caseload, Rhode Island, 1997–2023*



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, December 1, 1997-2015, and RI Bridges Database, December 2016-2023. 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 the 2010-2022 caseload data. Comparisons to earlier years should be made with caution. Starting in 2016, caseload data are for the month of December and not for a point in time, December 1.

★ Since 1996, when the program began, the Rhode Island cash assistance caseload has declined steadily. Between 1996 and 2023, the Rhode Island cash assistance caseload decreased by 83%, from 18,428 cases to 3,151 families. The number of families receiving cash assistance increased from 2022 to 2023 but is still below the 2019 pre-pandemic caseload.¹¹

★ The RI Works caseload 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 (which have since been removed so that now only a 60-month lifetime limit is in place), closing the entire family's case when parents reach their time limit, and limiting eligibility for legal permanent residents to those who have had that status for five years.^{12,13}

★ In December 2023, there were 2,475 adults and 5,644 children under age 18 enrolled in RI Works. Seventy percent of RI Works beneficiaries were children, and 41% of the children enrolled in RI Works were under the age of six.¹⁴

★ In December 2023, 64% (2,016) of RI Works cases were single-parent families, 31% (962) were child-only cases, and 5% (173) were two-parent families.¹⁵

★ In Rhode Island in 2022, there were 23,487 children living in poverty, with 12,400 living in deep poverty (defined as being 50% below the federal poverty line). However, only 3,101 families received cash assistance.^{16,17}

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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.¹⁸

Time Limits and Hardship Extensions

★ The lifetime limit for RI Works is 60 months. 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 (for six-month periods), there is no limit on the total time a family can receive a hardship extension.^{19,20,21}

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.²²

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.²³

Recent Policy Changes

★ The FY 2024 budget expanded eligibility to low-income, first-time pregnant individuals upon pregnancy verification, rather than waiting until the third trimester. The FY 2023 budget extended the lifetime limit from 48 to 60 months, amended the work requirements to allow a parent to attend the Community College of Rhode Island for two years, increased the earnings disregard from \$170 to \$300 a month, raised the asset limit from \$1,000 to \$5,000 to enable families to have savings and build a financial safety net, and excluded all state and federal tax returns and tax rebates from income eligibility.²⁴

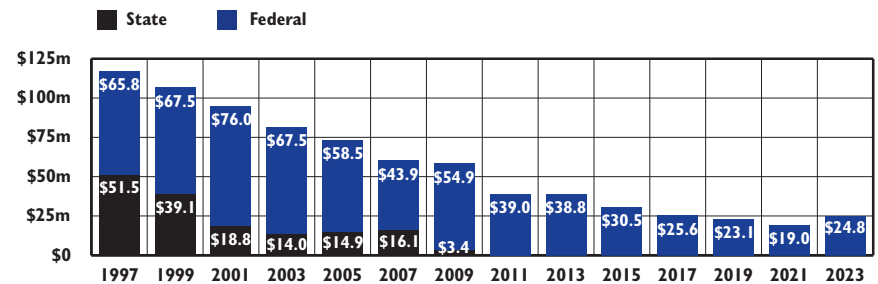
RI Works by Case Type, December 2023

	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Child-only cases	944	31%
Cases with adults with a work activity	1,510	48%
Cases with adults exempt from a work activity*	606	19%
Unknown status	73	2%
Total RI Works Caseload	3,151	

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, RI Bridges Database, December 2023.

*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 illness or incapacity (335), youngest child under age one (142), second parent is a non-participant (89), in third trimester of pregnancy (25), being a victim of domestic violence (3), or multiple reasons (12).

Rhode Island Cash Assistance Expenditures, State Fiscal Years 1996-2023

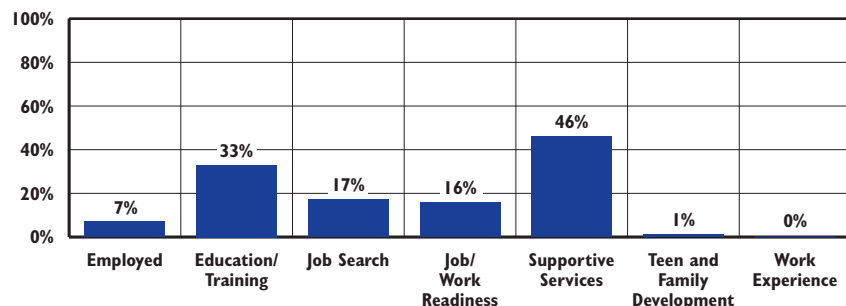


Sources: Rhode Island Department of Human Services. (2007). *Family Independence Program 2007 annual report*. (FY 1996-2001); House Fiscal Advisory Staff. (2004-2019). *Budget as enacted: Fiscal Years 2005-2019*. (FY 2002-2017); House Fiscal Advisory Staff. (2020). *FY 2020 revised budget: 2020-H 7170, Substitute A, as amended*. (FY 2018-19); House Fiscal Advisory Staff. (2022). *Budget as enacted: Fiscal Year 2024*. (FY 2022-2023). Fiscal years 1997-2022 are funds spent and FY 2023 is budget as enacted.

★ In State Fiscal Year 2023, for the fourteenth year in a row, no state general revenue was allocated for cash assistance. State general revenue spending for cash assistance decreased steadily from 1996 through 2010, and the program is now entirely supported by federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant funds. Total expenditures for cash assistance in Rhode Island (federal and state) decreased by 85% between 1996 (when the program began) and 2022 but then increased in 2023.^{25,26} In 2021, Rhode Island spent 12% of its TANF funds on cash assistance, significantly lower than the national share of 23%.²⁷

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Families Enrolled in the RI Works Program, by Type of Work Activity, December 2023



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, RI Bridges Database, December 2023. The total number of work activities (1,814) is larger than the number of families with a work activity (1,510) because some families (280) had multiple work activities during the month.

★ As of December 2023, 7% of families with work activities were employed, and <1% were in community work experience. Most of these families were also engaged in other work activities during the month.²⁸

★ Parents with limited training and skills can participate in basic education and work skills programs. Parents also can receive up to two years of education as part of their 60-month lifetime limit.²⁹ As of December 2023, 33% of families were participating in education or training programs.³⁰

★ Seventeen percent of families with a work activity were participating in job search activities, including job search and job skills development programs delivered in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, and were participating in other job readiness activities. Forty-six percent of families were receiving supportive services, including mental or physical health and substance abuse treatment, and housing and homelessness services needed to address barriers to employment.^{31,32}

★ An additional 1% of families received educational support through the Teen and Family Development Program, a program for young parents.³³

Support for Young Parents

★ Seventy-eight percent of children born to teen mothers who never marry and do not graduate from high school live in poverty.³⁴

★ RI Works provides additional support to young parents. Parents who are under age 20 and do not have a high school diploma or GED are required to receive 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.³⁵

★ In December 2023, there were 62 parents under the age of 20 enrolled in RI Works. Some are parent heads of household, and others may be parts of multi-generational households.³⁶

Support for Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families

★ Recent research conducted in several states shows that cash assistance recipients report physical and mental health disabilities at higher rates than the general population. Parents with physical or mental health conditions can face barriers to employment, including discrimination by employers.³⁷

★ 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 or to substance abuse or mental health treatment, as appropriate.³⁸

★ As of December 2023, 363 families (12% of the total RI Works caseload) had hardship extensions, 22 for a physical or mental disability, seven who were unable to work due to a domestic violence situation, five to care for a disabled family member, three due to homelessness, and 326 because of economic hardship or another critical condition or circumstance.³⁹ 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 low levels of education and limited work experience.^{40,41}

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Table 12. Children in Families Receiving Cash Assistance (RI Works), Rhode Island, December 2023

CITY/TOWN	# OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18	NUMBER RECEIVING CASH ASSISTANCE		% OF CHILDREN RECEIVING CASH ASSISTANCE
		FAMILIES	CHILDREN	
Barrington	4,489	8	20	<1%
Bristol	2,887	17	25	1%
Burrillville	3,229	19	35	1%
Central Falls	6,411	150	286	4%
Charlestown	1,161	2	4	<1%
Coventry	6,655	35	55	1%
Cranston	15,744	152	247	2%
Cumberland	7,550	36	64	1%
East Greenwich	3,465	6	10	<1%
East Providence	7,886	110	181	2%
Exeter	1,175	2	2	<1%
Foster	790	1	4	1%
Glocester	1,896	5	8	<1%
Hopkinton	1,613	6	11	1%
Jamestown	871	2	5	1%
Johnston	5,119	51	81	2%
Lincoln	4,640	36	60	1%
Little Compton	568	2	4	1%
Middletown	3,487	44	72	2%
Narragansett	1,651	4	9	1%
New Shoreham	189	0	0	0%
Newport	3,660	117	215	6%
North Kingstown	5,496	37	60	1%
North Providence	5,802	89	149	3%
North Smithfield	2,274	7	13	1%
Pawtucket	16,455	382	637	4%
Portsmouth	3,444	13	26	1%
Providence	41,021	1,195	2,266	6%
Richmond	1,627	4	9	1%
Scituate	1,866	9	16	1%
Smithfield	3,411	13	22	1%
South Kingstown	4,339	11	23	1%
Tiverton	2,723	17	25	1%
Warren	1,826	13	20	1%
Warwick	14,034	117	197	1%
West Greenwich	1,251	4	5	<1%
West Warwick	5,787	66	119	2%
Westerly	3,826	19	31	1%
Woonsocket	9,467	345	620	7%
Other/Unknown	NA	5	8	NA
Four Core Cities	73,354	2,072	3,809	5%
Remainder of State	136,431	1,074	1,827	1%
Rhode Island	209,785	3,151	5,644	3%



Education and Training Supporting Employment

★ Between 2017 and 2022, almost 63,354 working-age adults (18 to 64) in Rhode Island did not have a high school diploma or GED.⁴²

★ Nationally, between 2020 and 2030, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring a high school diploma.⁴³ Between 2017 and 2022, the unemployment rate for Rhode Islanders without a high school diploma was 10.6%, compared to 6.8% for those with a high school degree and 2.9% for those with a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴⁴

★ Parents enrolled in RI Works face significant barriers to success in the labor market. Twenty-nine percent of parents enrolled in RI Works report did not finish high school. Among a group of parents receiving cash assistance who were tested in March 2020, about one-third (34%) of those tested in English tested at or below the sixth grade reading level, while more than half (56%) 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.⁴⁵

★ Recent research has shown that well-designed and well-implemented programs that focus on building skills and providing support can increase future employment and earnings of cash assistance recipients. Programs that combine education, training, and support services are more effective than standalone job search or skills instruction programs.⁴⁶ States should explore how to meet their work participation rate while offering beneficiaries a chance to improve job skills and long-term work preparedness.⁴⁷

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Human Services, RI Bridges Database, December 2023. 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 2020, Table P2 and Table P4.

Communities may have more families than children receiving cash assistance because a pregnant woman without children is eligible upon verification of pregnancy.

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

References

^{1,2,3,5,8,18,19,20,22,23,24,29,32,35,38} Rhode Island Works Program rules and regulations, 218-RICR-20-00-2 (2021). Retrieved December 22, 2023, from sos.ri.gov

^{4,11,14,15,17,28,30,31,33,36,39,45} Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database and RI Bridges Database, December 1996-2023.

⁶ Child Support Program rules and regulations, 218-RICR-30-00-1 (2021). Retrieved March 28, 2023, from sos.ri.gov

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