

Legislative Wrap-Up

2024 Session of the Rhode Island General Assembly

Selected laws and budget appropriations affecting children in the areas of economic well-being, early learning and development, education, health, and safety.

Economic Well-Being

VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ Improvements to the Rhode Island Works program, including increases in the monthly benefit and income disregard and repeal of the full family sanction.*
- ◆ \$800,000 allocated to administer the Summer EBT program, which will provide \$120 per school-aged child over the summer.
- ◆ \$120 million housing bond to be included on the November 2024 ballot.
- ◆ Additional rights and protections for renters.

***Rhode Island Works Program:** The FY 2025 budget repealed the full family sanction and implemented a 20% increase in monthly cash assistance payments, raising the monthly payment for a family of four from \$825 to \$990 starting July 1, 2024. The budget also increased the income disregard from \$300 to \$525. These changes are fully funded through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families federal grant. No state dollars were allocated.

Payday Lending: Legislation did not pass that would have repealed the provisions that allow deferred deposit providers, also known as payday lenders.

Summer EBT: The budget allocated \$800,000 for administrative expenses to support the Department of Human Services (DHS) in distributing over \$10 million in federal SUN Bucks benefits via EBT cards to 90,000 school-aged children to support their nutrition while

schools are closed during the summer. Families will receive \$120 in a lump sum during the summer of 2024.

Minimum Wage: Legislation passed that now includes domestic workers, such as those providing child care in private homes, under the state's minimum wage protections. Legislation did not pass that would have repealed the exclusion of student workers under the age of 19 from the state's minimum wage.

***Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)/Child Tax Credit (CTC):** The FY 2025 budget did not include any increases to the state EITC. Legislation to create a \$1,000 child tax credit per dependent for taxpayers with annual incomes under \$100,000 for single filers or \$150,000 for joint filers also did not pass.

Funding for Affordable Housing and Homelessness: The FY 2025 budget included approval for a \$120 million housing bond to be included on the ballot for the upcoming November 2024 election. If passed by voters, the bond would provide \$80 million for affordable housing, of which up to \$10 million may be used to support a new public housing development program, \$20 million for homeownership programs, \$10 million for community revitalization, \$5 million for site acquisition, \$4 million for housing-related infrastructure, and \$1 million for municipal planning.

Renter Protections: Legislation passed that requires that landlords give at least 90 days of notice before increasing the rent and at least 120 days to tenants over age 62, requires that landlords list all mandatory fees on rental listings and leases, and prohibits landlords from charging a convenience fee when tenants pay rent.

Housing Development: The General Assembly passed a package of more than a dozen bills designed to address the state's housing crisis, including legislation related to zoning, permitting, planning, the sale of abandoned property, and accessory dwelling units.

Early Learning & Development

VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ Early Intervention and First Connections programs will receive the OHIC recommended Medicaid rate increase.*
- ◆ Eligibility for Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) expanded to 261% of the federal poverty level.*
- ◆ Rate increases for child care centers serving children participating CCAP.*
- ◆ The Child Care for Child Care Educators pilot program will be continued for another year.*
- ◆ \$7.1 million increase in RI Pre-K funding, some of which will be combined with Head Start funding to serve three and four-year-olds.*
- ◆ State required to produce an annual report on the early care and education workforce.*
- ◆ Paid family leave extended so workers can take 7 weeks starting in 2025 and 8 weeks starting in 2026.*

***Early Intervention (EI):** The FY 2025 budget includes \$3.8 million in state and federal funding to fully fund the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner (OHIC) recommended Medicaid rate increase. This rate increase will also trigger rate increases for providers serving children enrolled in EI who have commercial insurance. Legislation did not pass that would have provided a larger 25% Medicaid rate increase and updated the EI statute to name EOHHS as the state agency responsible for implementing EI or that would have enabled EI staff to qualify for child care assistance.

***First Connections & Family Home Visiting:** The FY 2025 budget includes \$345,000 in state and federal funding to fully fund the OHIC recommended Medicaid rate increase for First Connections. Legislation did not pass that would have sustained the existing temporary Medicaid rate increase for the First Connections newborn home visiting program or required the state to develop a plan to provide universal newborn home visiting and and maximize federal funding to strengthen and expand evidence-based family home visiting.

***Child Care Assistance Program:** The FY 2025 budget includes \$3.3 million in federal funding to increase eligibility to 261% of the federal poverty level, the highest in state history, beginning in January 2025. The budget also

includes \$3.4 million in federal funding to provide a 5% rate increase to child care centers beginning in July 2024, comparable to increases negotiated for family child care programs through collective bargaining. Legislation proposing larger increases in eligibility and rates and removing the requirement that families participate in child support to qualify for CCAP did not pass.

***Early Educator Recruitment and Retention:** The FY 2025 budget includes \$2.5 million in federal funding to provide a one-year extension for the Child Care for Child Care Educators pilot program which provides free child care to educators and staff with household incomes below 300% of the federal poverty line. Legislation did not pass that would have eliminated the household income limit, enabled EI staff to qualify, required the state to continue funding the Child Care WAGE\$ program for the most qualified and lowest paid early educators, and continue funding retention bonuses for child care staff.

***Early Care and Education Workforce Data Act:** Legislation passed establishing a state early care and education workforce registry that meets national guidelines and requires an annual state report on the status of educators including demographics, education levels, and turnover.

Background Check Fee: Legislation did not pass that would have required the state to cover the cost of background checks for any new job candidate applying for a position in a licensed child care center, family child care home, child-placing agency, child-caring agency, children's behavioral health care program, or foster/adoptive home.

***Early Childhood Mental Health Hub:** Legislation did not pass that would have established a five-year pilot program to improve access to infant and early childhood mental health services for children under age six and their families.

***RI Pre-K:** The FY 2025 budget includes \$7.1 million in new state general revenue funding to expand and strengthen RI Pre-K, including \$100,000 for a new position at RIDE. Legislation did not pass that would have required the state to fund a 30% infant/toddler set aside as RI Pre-K expands, include family child care programs in RI Pre-K delivery, remove geographic restrictions on enrollment, and raise wages for RI Pre-K and Head Start teachers to close the compensation gap between public preschool and kindergarten teachers.

***Revenue for Child Care/Early Learning:** Legislation did not pass that would have added a 3% surtax on millionaires (personal income over \$1,000,000) to generate \$126 million in new state revenue, a portion of which would be invested in child care and early learning programs.

RI Permanent Legislative Commission on Child Care: Legislation did not pass that would have updated the

membership, purpose and name of the commission to add early learning services and pre-kindergarten.

Governance of Early Learning Systems: Legislation did not pass that would have created a new Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning or requested that the Children’s Cabinet hold an open meeting to review progress on implementation of the recommendations in the Early Childhood Governance Working Group’s report.

***Young Children with Developmental Delays and Disabilities:** Legislation did not pass that would have established a task force managed by the Children’s Cabinet to develop recommendations to improve access to Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education services.

***Paid Family Leave:** Legislation passed that adds two weeks of paid family leave to the Temporary Caregivers Insurance program over the next two years. Workers caring for a new baby, newly adopted or foster child, or seriously ill family member will be eligible for 7 weeks of paid leave starting January 2025 and 8 weeks starting January 2026. The dependent allowance was increased from \$10 to \$20 per dependent per week. Legislation did not pass that would have updated the definition of family.

Early Learning Program Quality: Legislation passed that removes the requirement for private schools that operate preschool classrooms to participate in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Summer Camp Licensing: Legislation passed that establishes a summer camp licensing system. Summer camps that serve children participating in the Child Care Assistance Program will be required to be licensed as of January 1, 2025.

Child Care Licensing: Legislation did not pass that would have required the state to meet national caseload standards for child care licensing inspectors.

K-2 Class Size Cap: Legislation did not pass that would have established a maximum class size of 20 children for Kindergarten through Grade 2.

Education

VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ Funding to support Multilingual Learners was increased and built into the core education funding formula.
- ◆ Students who were previously eligible for reduced-price school meals will now get them for free.
- ◆ Parents of students with special education needs were given additional rights.
- ◆ \$5 million allocated to improve reading and math achievement.
- ◆ *Transparency in Arts Education Access and Proficiency Act* passed.
- ◆ The Rhode Island Hope Scholarship pilot was extended until July 1, 2030.

Education Funding Formula: Education Funding Formula: The FY 2025 budget increased state aid by \$70.9 million. Funding for Multilingual Learners was incorporated into the core funding formula and the multiplier was raised from 15% to 20% of the core per-pupil amount for each Multilingual Learner in the lowest three proficiency categories.

Bilingual Education: Legislation that would have created a program to increase the issuance of teaching certificates to bilingual, dual language, and world language teachers in urban and urban-ring schools did not pass and no funding was allocated to expand dual language programs.

Special Education: Legislation passed that requires public schools to obtain parental consent before evaluating a student, placing a student, or changing a student’s IEP or placement. Schools must provide parents with evaluation reports and proposed goals and objectives for at least three days before IEP meetings. The bill also gives parents the right to observe any placement proposed for their child.

Career and Technical Education: The FY 25 budget allocates \$2.0 million in career and technical funds to be overseen by the career and technical education board of trustees to develop workforce training programs for jobs that lack active training programs.

School Housing Aid: The FY 2025 budget includes \$106 million for housing aid to districts, \$2 million over the FY 2024 enacted budget.

School Meals: The FY 2025 budget included \$813,000 to provide free breakfast and lunch to the 6,500 students statewide who currently receive reduced-price school meals. Legislation to offer free meals to all students, regardless of income, did not pass. Legislation passed that waives the whole grain requirements for a year.

Out-of-School Suspension: Legislation that would have required school districts to implement culturally competent, de-escalation, and trauma-informed methods to minimize classroom disruptions, reduce out-of-school suspensions, and enhance student learning did not pass.

School Emergency Drills Act: Legislation passed that mandates that emergency drills be trauma-informed and age-appropriate, prohibits active shooter simulations when students are present, and requires annual parental notifications about drills. It allows modifications for student needs, mandates debriefing after real emergencies, and integrates trauma-informed practices into school safety plans.

Mental Health: The FY 2025 budget did not allocate funding to expand the number of school social workers, school psychologists, and other school-based mental health professionals.

Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Academy: Legislation passed that reconstitutes the academy as a public school and local educational agency to support at-risk students, especially pregnant and parenting teens, and recent immigrants. The academy will offer comprehensive support services, an accelerated academic curriculum, and life skills training. Governed by a board of trustees appointed by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, the academy will accept students from any district and enroll those up to 22 years old. Funding will be shared by the state and the student's district, with eligibility for additional state and federal aid.

Reading and Math: The FY 2025 budget allocated \$5 million specifically for initiatives aimed at improving reading and math achievement.

Transparency in Arts Education Access and Proficiency Act: Legislation passed to promote arts education by requiring middle and high schools to provide annual reports on the availability of arts education and the percentage of students enrolled in arts classes, including classes in dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts, requiring that high schools provide a sample of graduated students' portfolios demonstrating proficiency in the arts, and requiring that RIDE designate an arts education curriculum coordinator.

Civic Education: Legislation did not pass to create a new categorical funding category for civics education.

Youth Voice: Legislation did not pass that would have given the chairperson of the Student Advisory Council voting powers on the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.

Out-of-School Time Learning: The FY 2025 budget allocates \$5 million to the Governor's Learn365RI initiative.

Legislation did not pass for an annual appropriation of \$4 million for out-of-school time programs.

Rhode Island Hope Scholarship: The budget allocated \$3.3 million for the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship at Rhode Island College and extended the pilot to July 1, 2030.

Rhode Island Promise: The FY 2025 budget allocated \$7.3 million from general revenues for the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship at the Community College of Rhode Island, a decrease from the \$8.6 million in the FY 2024 budget.

Dual and Concurrent Enrollment: The FY 2025 budget allocated \$2.3 million in general revenue for dual and concurrent enrollment, which allows high school students to earn college credits at no cost.

Health

VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ \$120 million allocated to fully fund recommended increases to Medicaid rates for home and community-based services for children and families.
- ◆ Consumer protections included in the *Affordable Care Act* were put into state law, including prohibitions against annual and lifetime limits.
- ◆ *Healthcare Provider Shield Act* passed.

Medicaid Rates: The FY 2025 budget includes \$163.4 million including \$64.3 million in general revenue to fully fund the rate increase recommended by the Office of Health Insurance Commissioner (OHIC) for home and community-based, behavioral health care, and children's services. Home and community-based services for children and families included in this increase are Early Intervention, First Connections, CEDARR, CRAFT, and other home/center-based therapeutic services.

***Medicaid Coverage:** Legislation passed that safeguards the federal *Affordable Care Act's* prohibition against annual and lifetime limits in health coverage. Legislation did not pass that would have provided continuous Medicaid coverage for young children from birth through age five to ensure that babies and young children can get regular well-child visits, developmental screenings, and other care needed during the early years.

Health Care Access: The *Healthcare Provider Shield Act* passed, which will protect medical providers who provide gender-affirming and reproductive health care services in Rhode Island from civil or criminal suits from other states or their residents.

Health Care Workforce: Legislation passed to include as part of the Wavemaker Scholarship Program a 4-year scholarship program for primary care physicians, nurse

practitioners, and physician's assistants. Students would either remain in Rhode Island after medical school or return after residency training in family medicine, pediatrics, or internal medicine to practice primary care for 8 years. The goal is to encourage medical students to become primary care providers in Rhode Island. Legislation passed that expands equitable access to lactation support professionals and specifies the requirements and procedures for licensing lactation counselors.

***Mental Health:** The FY 2025 budget includes additional funds to maintain the 9-8-8 National Suicide hotline and \$5.0 million for Children's Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS), which provide on-demand crisis intervention services in any setting in which a behavioral health crisis is occurring. The budget also includes \$76.7 million including \$27.0 in general revenue to support the new Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) model and assumes a start date of October 1, 2024. Legislation also passed that includes \$850,000 in FY 2025 for the Department of Health to sustain Rhode Island's Psychiatry Resource Network (PRN), a statewide teleconsultation resource for medical providers which serves primary care providers treating moms and children.

Lead Poisoning Prevention: The FY 2025 budget preserves the statewide rental registry, a public rental property database with landlord contact information, and requires landlords who own non-exempt buildings built before 1978, the year lead paint was banned, to provide a valid certificate showing the building is lead safe.

Tobacco: The FY 2025 budget includes a 25 cent increase in the cigarette excise tax, establishes an excise tax on Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) products, moves the regulatory authority for ENDS from the Department of Health to the Department of Revenue to create a centralized tobacco licensing and enforcement structure, and codifies existing ENDS flavor restrictions regulations with the exception of menthol.

Income Verification Software: The FY 2025 budget included funds for income verification software that could be used to obtain more accurate and timely income data for Medicaid and Department of Human Services programs.

Safety

VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ Common sense gun legislation passed that requires safe storage of firearms.
- ◆ \$1 million to establish a Foster Care Youth Scholarship program at Rhode Island College.

DCYF Budget: The FY 2025 budget provides \$399 million for the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) which included \$1.5 million (\$1.0 in general revenue) for future rating setting for Medicaid and non-Medicaid funded programs, including congregate care and home-based services and \$900,000 from general revenue to add eight new positions at the Training School.

OCA Budget: The FY 2025 budget provides \$1.9 million for the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA), including \$250,000 for an increase of 3.0 FTEs for a new investigator, case manager, and attorney.

DCYF Comprehensive Needs Assessment: Legislation did not pass that would have required DCYF to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment every two years and establish an advisory committee for this needs assessment that would include system leaders as well as youth and/or parents with lived experience. However, the FY 2025 budget does include \$300,000 to fund a consultant to provide a comprehensive needs assessment for the Department.

Foster Youth Scholarship: The FY 2025 budget includes \$1 million in state fiscal recovery funds to support a last dollar scholarship program for DCYF foster care youth to attend Rhode Island College and would fully fund tuition, room and board, and/or support services, including during the summer months. The Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner will distribute the funds through the Rhode Island College Foundation.

Higher Education Opportunity Incentive Grant: The FY 2025 budget includes updates to DCYF's Higher Education Opportunity Incentive grant which is available to youth in the care and custody of DCYF who wish to pursue postsecondary education at a state college in Rhode Island. Youth with foster care involvement will be informed at the beginning of high school (at age 14) about their eligibility. Grant awards will be made by DCYF. All qualified applicants will receive the grant as funding allows and can use funds for tuition, fees, books, academic support, transportation, food, and housing. Years to degree completion are no longer restricted to 2 or 4 years, but students must be enrolled in no less than 6 credits per semester. The grant remains level funded at \$200,000.

Child Support: Legislation did not pass to align Rhode Island state law with federal guidance which only requires biological parents to pay support and maintenance payments when their child is in foster care in very rare circumstances.

Foster Parent's Bill of Rights: Legislation did not pass that would have updated the *Foster Parent's Bill of Rights* and required that foster parents' grievances be directed to the Office of the Child Advocate and that DCYF provide an annual report on violations of the *Foster Parent's Bill of Rights*.

ID for Minors: Legislation did not pass that would have allowed a minor ages 14 to 17 in the custody of DCYF, or without a permanent residence, to get a state identification card without a signature from a parent, guardian or foster parent and get a certified copy of their birth certificate at no cost.

Indian Child Welfare Act: Legislation did not pass that would have codified into Rhode Island state law protections provided by the federal *Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)*.

Gun Safety: Legislation passed that requires the safe storage of firearms, provides civil and criminal penalties for violations, adds rifles and shotguns to the types of firearms requiring a trigger lock to be included with purchase, and requires firearms dealers to post signs regarding safe storage. Legislation did not pass that would have banned the possession, sale, and transfer of assault weapons.

Minimum Age for Youth at the Training School: Legislation did not pass that would have prohibited the incarceration (pre-trial detention or sentencing) of children under the age of 14 at the Rhode Island Training School (except in cases when the juvenile is charged with murder, first degree sexual assault, or an attempt to commit such offenses).

Youth Interrogation: Legislation did not pass that would have prohibited any questioning of a juvenile who is suspected of delinquent or criminal behavior unless the parent or guardian of the juvenile is present during questioning. Legislation also did not pass that would have prohibited a peace officer from employing threats, physical harm, deprivation, deception, coercion, or psychologically manipulative interrogation tactics during the custodial interrogation of a juvenile.

Juvenile Parole: Legislation did not pass that would have made prisoners who committed offenses prior to age 18 and who were sentenced as adults eligible for parole after completing 15 years of their sentence.

Parental Incarceration: Legislation did not pass that would have required the courts to consider the parental

status of a defendant at the time of sentencing and unless the parent poses a significant risk to the community that outweighs the harm of the parent's absence from their child's life, to issue a sentence that does not include imprisonment.

Automatic Certification to Adult Court: Legislation did not pass that would have removed the requirement that any person aged 16 or older who has been found delinquent for having committed two offenses after the age of 16 be automatically certified.

Other

Equity Impact Statements: Legislation did not pass that would have required that the Governor's proposed annual budget include an explanation of how the budget supports ongoing efforts to promote equity in Rhode Island and requested equity impact statements for some legislation.

Voting Access: Legislation did not pass that would have allowed consideration of an amendment to the state constitution regarding same day voter registration, which is currently permitted in 22 states and the District of Columbia and is already in place for the U.S. presidential election in Rhode Island.

***Revenue:** Legislation did not pass that would have added a 3% surtax on millionaires (personal income over \$1,000,000). The revenue would be used for child care and early learning programs; public education; public colleges and universities; the repair and maintenance of roads and bridges; and public transportation.*

**Right from the Start Campaign priority. Please see rightfromthestart.org for more information.*

Fiscal Year 2025 Budget

The Rhode Island General Assembly enacted an FY 2025 budget in the amount of \$14.0 billion. The budget consists of \$5.6 billion in state general revenue, \$5.1 billion in federal funds, \$463 million in restricted receipts, and \$2.8 billion in other funds.



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