

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. Families qualify based on their income, resources, and the number of people in their families.¹

RI Works recipients must participate in an employment plan unless they qualify 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 employment goals, including opportunities to seek additional education or training to improve their employability prospects.²

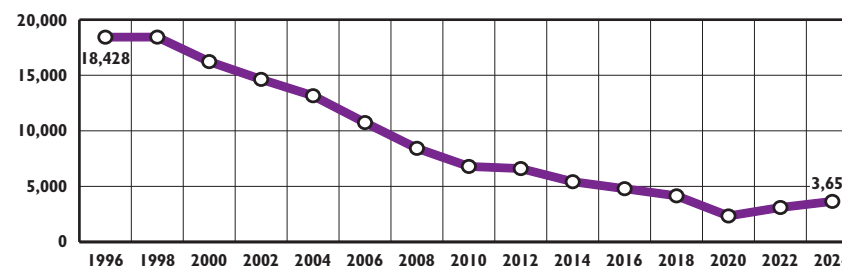
RI Works provides a safety net for children whose parents are unable to work due to a disability or who have insufficient earnings or work experience to qualify for unemployment benefits.³ In 2024, the average hourly wage of working parents enrolled in RI Works was \$17.84 per hour.⁴

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 rest is kept by the state and federal governments.^{6,7} Colorado, Illinois, and Michigan pass through all current child support, and Maryland families receive up to \$100 for one child and up to \$200 for two or more children.^{8,9} States can pass through up to \$100 for one child and \$200 for two or more children without having to repay the federal government its portion of child support payments.¹⁰

The maximum monthly benefit for a family of three is \$865 per month.¹¹ Benefits have been raised only twice in the past 30 years and the maximum benefit is still only 41% of the federal poverty threshold.^{12,13,14}



Cash Assistance Caseload, Rhode Island, 1996–2024*



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, December 1, 1996–2015, and RI Bridges Database, December 2016–2024. 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 2010–2024 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 2024, the Rhode Island cash assistance caseload decreased by from 18,428 cases to 3,650 families. The number of families receiving cash assistance increased from 2020 to 2024 but is still below the 2019 pre-pandemic caseload.¹⁵

◆ The RI Works caseload declined due to policies implemented in 2008 when the program changed from the Family Independence Program (FIP) to RI Works. Some of these policies have since been removed (e.g., shorter time limit, and full family sanction) but others remain, including limiting eligibility for legal permanent residents to those who have had that status for five years.^{16,17}

◆ In December 2024, there were 2,969 adults and 6,388 children under age 18 enrolled in RI Works. Sixty-eight percent of RI Works beneficiaries were children, and 39% of the children enrolled in RI Works were under the age of six.¹⁸

◆ In December 2024, 63% (2,310) of RI Works cases were single-parent families, (30%) 1,111 were child-only cases, and 6% (229) were two-parent families.¹⁹

◆ Between 2019 and 2020, 26 out of every 100 families living in poverty in Rhode Island received RI Works assistance, down from 113 out of every 100 families living in poverty between 1995 and 1996.²⁰

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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.²¹

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 homelessness, 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.^{22,23}

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.²⁴

Recent Policy Changes

◆ The FY 2023 budget extended the lifetime limit from 48 to 60 months, modified work requirements to allow parents to attend the Community College of Rhode Island for two years, raised the asset limit from \$1,000 to \$5,000 to support financial stability, and excluded state and federal tax returns and rebates from income eligibility calculations. The FY 2024 budget expanded program eligibility to low-income, first-time pregnant individuals upon pregnancy verification, eliminating the previous requirement to wait until the third trimester.^{25,26} The FY 2025 budget further strengthened support by repealing the full-family sanction, increasing monthly cash assistance by 20% (raising payments for a family of four from \$825 to \$990), and raising the income disregard from \$300 to \$525.²⁷

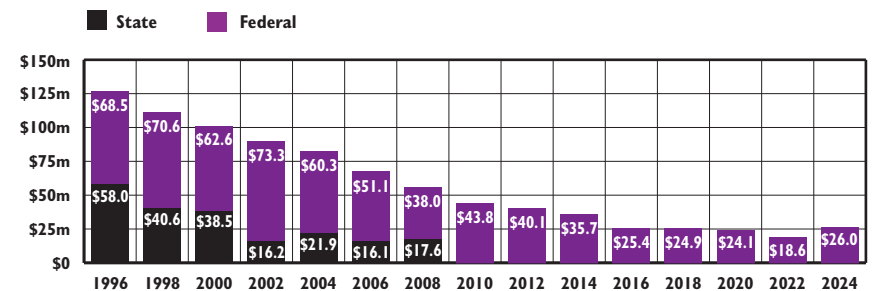
RI Works by Case Type, December 2024

	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Child-only cases	1,111	30%
Cases with adults with a work activity	1,843	50%
Cases with adults exempt from a work activity*	441	12%
Cases without work activity	255	7%
Total RI Works Caseload	3,650	

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, RI Bridges Database, December 2024.

*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 (176), second parent is a non-participant (115), youngest child under age one (107), in third trimester of pregnancy (29), being a victim of domestic violence (<10), or multiple reasons (11).

Rhode Island Cash Assistance Expenditures, State Fiscal Years 1996-2024

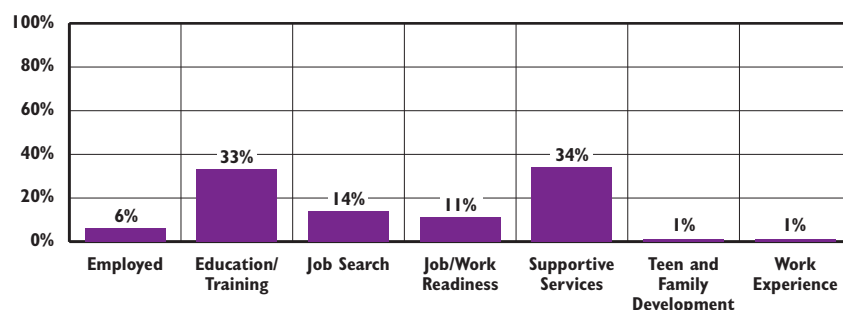


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◆ In State Fiscal Year 2024, for the fifteenth year in a row, no state general revenue was allocated for cash assistance. State general revenue spending for cash assistance decreased steadily from 1996 through 2010, and the program is now entirely 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 2021, but then slightly increased from 2021 to 2024.^{28,29} In 2022, Rhode Island spent 15% of its TANF funds on cash assistance, significantly lower than the national share of 23%.³⁰

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Families Enrolled in the RI Works Program,
by Type of Work Activity, December 2024



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, RI Bridges Database, December 2024. The total number of work activities (2,268) is larger than the number of families with a work activity (1,843) because some families (380) had multiple work activities during the month.

◆ As of December 2024, 6% 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.³¹

◆ 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.³² As of December 2024, 33% of families were participating in education or training programs.³³

◆ Fourteen 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. Thirty-four 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.^{34,35}

◆ An additional 1% of families received educational support through the Teen and Family Development Program, a program for young parents.³⁶


Support for Young Parents

◆ 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.³⁷

◆ In December 2024, there were 49 parents under the age of 20 enrolled in RI Works. Some are parent heads of household, and others may be part of multi-generational households.³⁸


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.³⁹

◆ 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.⁴⁰

◆ As of December 2024, 510 families (14% of the total RI Works caseload) had hardship extensions, 22 for a physical or mental disability, 10 who were unable to work due to a domestic violence situation, 10 for caring for a family member with a disability, eight due to homelessness, and 464 because of economic hardship or another critical condition or circumstance.⁴¹ 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.^{42,43}

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Table 10. Children in Families Receiving Cash Assistance (RI Works), Rhode Island, December 2024

CITY/TOWN	# OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18	NUMBER RECEIVING CASH ASSISTANCE		% OF CHILDREN RECEIVING CASH ASSISTANCE
		FAMILIES	CHILDREN	
Barrington	4,489	10	20	<1%
Bristol	2,887	14	16	1%
Burrillville	3,229	26	47	1%
Central Falls	6,411	166	308	5%
Charlestown	1,161	2	4	<1%
Coventry	6,655	34	49	1%
Cranston	15,744	170	264	2%
Cumberland	7,550	39	65	1%
East Greenwich	3,465	13	19	1%
East Providence	7,886	121	189	2%
Exeter	1,175	2	5	<1%
Foster	790	6	9	1%
Glocester	1,896	5	8	<1%
Hopkinton	1,613	4	7	<1%
Jamestown	871	4	5	1%
Johnston	5,119	65	105	2%
Lincoln	4,640	32	53	1%
Little Compton	568	2	4	1%
Middletown	3,487	54	94	3%
Narragansett	1,651	5	12	1%
New Shoreham	189	0	0	<1%
Newport	3,660	132	250	7%
North Kingstown	5,496	27	45	1%
North Providence	5,802	76	117	2%
North Smithfield	2,274	10	18	1%
Pawtucket	16,455	474	777	5%
Portsmouth	3,444	14	34	1%
Providence	41,021	1,411	2,571	6%
Richmond	1,627	5	12	1%
Scituate	1,866	2	3	<1%
Smithfield	3,411	13	22	1%
South Kingstown	4,339	23	37	1%
Tiverton	2,723	18	29	1%
Warren	1,826	24	37	2%
Warwick	14,034	114	179	1%
West Greenwich	1,251	2	2	<1%
West Warwick	5,787	116	196	3%
Westerly	3,826	15	26	1%
Woonsocket	9,467	397	742	8%
Other/Unknown	NA	3	8	NA
Four Core Cities	73,354	2,448	4,398	6%
Remainder of State	136,431	1,202	1,990	1%
Rhode Island	209,785	3,650	6,388	3%



Education and Training Supporting Employment

◆ Between 2019 and 2023, an estimated 63,704 working-age adults (18 to 64) in Rhode Island did not have a high school diploma or GED.⁴⁴

◆ Nationally, between 2023 and 2033, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring a high school diploma.⁴⁵ Between 2019 and 2023, the unemployment rate for Rhode Islanders without a high school diploma was 10.6%, compared to 6.4% for those with a high school degree and 2.8% for those with a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴⁶

◆ Parents enrolled in RI Works face significant barriers to success in the labor market. Thirty-two percent of parents enrolled in RI Works report not finishing high school.⁴⁷

◆ 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.⁴⁸ States should explore how to meet their work participation rate while offering beneficiaries a chance to improve job skills and long-term work preparedness.⁴⁹

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Human Services, RI Bridges Database, December 2024. 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 if in the final trimester of her pregnancy.

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

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