

Legislative Wrap-Up

2026 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.

Overarching

***+Millionaire Tax:** The FY 2027 budget includes a phased-in increase in tax on annual income exceeding \$1 million. The tax will be implemented gradually over three years with a 1% increase each year (a 6.99% tax rate in 2027, 7.99% in 2028, and 8.99% in 2029) and is expected to generate additional revenue to support state investments and respond to anticipated federal funding changes.

Voting Access: Legislation did not pass that would have codified federal protections against voter suppression into state law, including explicitly prohibiting voting discrimination based on age, ancestry, disability, marital status, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and required language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency. Legislation also did not pass that would have allowed for consideration of an amendment to the state constitution to allow for same day voter registration as is already in place for the U.S. presidential election in Rhode Island.

Economic Well-Being

VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ Rhode Island's first permanent, refundable Child Tax Credit established.*
- ◆ Increase in child support pass-through for families participating in RI Works.+

***Child Tax Credit:** The FY 2027 budget creates Rhode Island's first permanent, refundable Child Tax Credit, providing a refundable tax credit of up to \$330 per child. The Child Tax

Credit will phase out for individual filers with incomes above \$100,000 and for joint filers with incomes above \$125,000. The dependent care exemption remains unchanged.

+Rhode Island Works Program: The FY 2027 budget increases the child support pass-through for families participating in RI Works from \$50 to \$100 per month for families with one child and \$200 per month for families with two or more children. This change allows more child support payments to reach children directly, helping families meet basic needs and improving economic stability. The FY 2027 budget did not include an increase in monthly RI Works cash assistance benefits, restore eligibility for Legal Permanent Residents (Green Card Holders) currently subject to a five-year waiting period, or eliminate the \$65 reduction in the monthly benefit for families living in subsidized housing.

+Baby Bonds: Legislation did not pass that would have established a dedicated funding source for the state's Baby Bonds program through unclaimed property funds. The proposal would have provided a \$3,000 investment account for eligible children born into families participating in RI Works without relying on taxpayer dollars.

Food Security: Federal bill H.R. 1 increased the state's administrative cost share for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) from 50% to 75% beginning in October 2026. The FY 2027 budget includes \$9.3 million from general revenues to account for the increased cost share. The budget also includes \$4.9 million (\$3.0 million in general revenue) for technology improvements and staffing increases needed to address the increased

call volume expected due to changes in eligibility for SNAP and other programs. The budget also includes \$3.0 million for the Rhode Island Community Food Bank to help address food insecurity and support access to nutritious food for Rhode Islanders experiencing hardship. Legislation also passed prohibiting restrictive covenants related to grocery stores, to begin addressing food deserts created by such covenants, and establishing the Food as Medicine Pilot program and task force.

Healthy Food Access: The FY 2027 budget provides \$4.1 million in general revenue to extend the Eat Well, Be Well Rewards Program, the nation's first statewide retail SNAP incentive program. The program provides SNAP participants with an additional 50 cents for every \$1 spent on eligible fruits and vegetables, helping families afford nutritious food and promoting healthy eating.

Funding for Affordable Housing and Homelessness: The FY 2027 budget includes approval for a \$120 million housing and community development bond to be included on the ballot for the upcoming November 2026 election. If passed by voters, the bond would support affordable housing construction and redevelopment as well as homeownership programs.

Renter Protections: Legislation passed that allows victims of abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking to terminate their leases early without penalty or liability and creates a process for abuse survivors to request that their locks be changed for their safety.

Early Learning & Development

VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ Child Care Assistance Program eligibility expanded to serve families with incomes up to 285% FPL.*
- ◆ Infant reimbursement rates for center-based providers increased by 5%.*
- ◆ The Child Care for Child Care Educators program extended until 2030.*
- ◆ Early Intervention rates were increased, and young children can now continue to receive services until the September 1st after their third birthday to provide continuity for children moving into preschool special education.*
- ◆ Additional state funds provided for family home visiting programs so state can draw down full federal match.*

***Child Care Assistance Program:** The FY 2027 budget increases eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program from 261% to 285% of the Federal Poverty Level and families remain eligible until they reach 325% of the Federal

Poverty Level, allowing more working families to access affordable child care. The budget also included a 5% increase in infant reimbursement rates for center-based providers to help stabilize the workforce. Legislation did not pass that would have created a new *Child Care Is Essential* statute, recognizing the value of the child care system for families' economic security and children's learning and development, or that would have removed the requirement that families participate in the state's Child Support Enforcement system to qualify for child care assistance.

***Early Educator Recruitment and Retention:** The FY 2027 budget extends the Child Care for Child Care Educators program for an additional two years or until 2030 and raised the income limit to participate in the program to match the newly increased limits of the Child Care Assistance Program.

***Early Educator Workforce:** Legislation did not pass that would have established the *Rhode Island Early Educator Workforce Act*, stabilizing and strengthening the early educator workforce.

***RI Pre-K:** Legislation did not pass that would have established guidelines for implementation and expansion of voluntary publicly funded prekindergarten for children ages three and four, recognized the federally-funded Head Start model as a critical part of the state's public prekindergarten system, set the goal to expand prekindergarten access as funds were available so at least 70% of all three- and four-year-olds could enroll in either RI Pre-K or Head Start, and required that RI Pre-K continue to meet high-quality, research-based standards and be delivered through a mixed delivery system including Head Start, child care, and public schools. Legislation also did not pass that would have updated the Early Childhood Categorical Fund in the school funding formula law to clarify that funds could be used to support both the state-managed RI Pre-K program and the federally managed Head Start program and required the Rhode Island Department of Education work with the Rhode Island Department of Human Services child care office and Head Start collaboration office to support sustainability and expansion of both RI Pre-K and Head Start.

***Early Intervention:** The FY 2027 state budget includes the funding for rate increases recommended by the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner's Social and Human Services rate review to be implemented in one year as well as a plan to study the extension of Early Intervention Services to children eligible for preschool special education who turn three after May 1st to remain in Early Intervention services until the September 1st following their third birthday, with the extension policy due to go into effect in 2028.

***Family Home Visiting:** The FY 2027 budget includes the funding needed to provide the rate increase recommended in the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner's Social

and Human Services rate review in one year rather than spreading this increase over two years. The budget also includes \$377,000 in general revenue needed so the state can draw down the full federal match, providing an additional \$1.1 million from federal funds for a total of \$10.9 million for FY 2027.

***Paid Family Leave:** Legislation did not pass that would have increased the number of weeks available through the Temporary Caregivers Insurance (TCI) paid family leave program to 10 weeks in 2027 and 12 weeks in 2028, added grandchildren and care recipients to the benefit definitions, and allowed self-employed workers to opt-in to the program.

Education

VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ Legislation passed to create a special joint legislative commission to make a comprehensive study of Rhode Island's education funding formula.
- ◆ The student success factor in the education funding formula was increased from 40% to 43%, providing more funding for low-income students.
- ◆ Funding to expand dual language education programs and increase the number of bilingual dual language and world language educators
- ◆ Rhode Island Hope Scholarship Pilot Program, which provides two years of free tuition at RIC, extended through 2033.
- ◆ \$100,000 allocated to the Rhode Island Afterschool Network for out-of-school time programs.[^]

Education Aid: The FY 2027 budget includes \$1.3 billion in education aid for local school districts, including state-operated schools and Central Falls, \$42.1 million more than in FY 2026. The budget includes \$28.9 million for the RI Pre-K program, consistent with FY 2026; \$20.0 million for high-cost special education, an increase of \$2.5 million from FY 2026; \$15 million for transportation, \$2.5 million over FY 2026; and \$5.5 million for career and technical education, \$1.0 million more than the FY 2026 budget. The FY 2027 budget increases the student success factor from 40% to 43% of the core instruction amount for all districts. Legislation also passed to create a special joint legislative commission to make a comprehensive study of Rhode Island's education funding formula. This commission will study how to fund and implement the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission. In addition, as part of the FY 2028 budget process, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) must submit a report comparing the Blue Ribbon Commission's education funding proposal to the current system by October 1, 2026.

~Youth and Educator Voice: Legislation to allow the Student Advisory Council chairperson to serve as a voting member of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education did not pass. The bill also would have added the Rhode Island Teacher of the Year as a voting member. Legislation also did not pass that would have allowed citizens of a city or town who are at least 16 years of age to register to vote and to vote in school committee elections in municipalities where school committees are elected entities.

~School Social Workers: Legislation did not pass that would have expanded student access to school social workers by investing \$2 million to help public schools achieve a minimum staffing ratio of one full-time social worker for every 250 students by 2030.

Anti-Hazing: Legislation passed that requires RIDE to establish an anti-hazing policy for student athletics.

School Meals: Legislation passed limiting transaction and processing fees on school meals. All school districts must offer at least one no-fee method of paying for school meals, and any fees that are charged cannot exceed the actual costs of collecting or processing payments. Legislation to offer free meals to all students, regardless of income, did not pass.

Bilingual Education: The FY 2027 budget includes \$750,000 to establish the Support and Access to Bilingual Education (SABE) Fund within the Rhode Island Department of Education. The fund will provide grants to support the establishment and expansion of dual language programs and to increase the number of bilingual dual language and world language educators in school districts with high concentrations of Multilingual Learners.

~School Libraries: Legislation did not pass that would have ensured that every public school has a school library in a permanent and dedicated space and that every public school has a certified school librarian to manage and maintain the library.

Right to Education: Legislation did not pass that would have amended the state constitution to guarantee all Rhode Island residents the equal right to an education that is adequate, equitable, and meaningful. The amendment also would have allowed this right to be enforced through the courts.

Central Falls: The FY 2027 budget restored local control to the Central Falls School District after more than 30 years of state oversight.

^Out-of-School Time Learning: The FY 2027 budget includes \$2 million for Learn365RI to expand access to high-quality out-of-school learning opportunities and support student success beyond the school day and year. Of this amount, \$100,000 will be allocated to the Rhode Island Afterschool Network.

Charter Schools: Legislation passed that bars the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education from granting approval to create or expand a charter school for three years beginning in the 2026-2027 school year and sets a limit on the total number of charter schools in the state at 28, down from 35.

School Vouchers: Legislation passed that prohibits Rhode Island from participating in federal school voucher tax credits for contributions to scholarship-granting organizations unless both the General Assembly and the Governor provide approval.

Rhode Island Hope Scholarship: The FY 2027 budget extends the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship for three years, allowing eligible Rhode Island students to continue receiving tuition-free junior and senior years at Rhode Island College.

Rhode Island Promise: Legislation did not pass that would allow students in workforce-ready certificate programs at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) to be eligible to receive the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship. However, the FY 2027 budget expands eligibility for the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship to students who enrolled in a postsecondary institution immediately after graduating high school (or received an equivalency diploma) and only remained in that institution for one semester and enrolled in CCRI the following semester. This expansion also allows eligible students to defer enrollment at CCRI for one semester.

In-State Tuition: Legislation passed that provides an exemption from paying non-resident tuition to any student who attended an approved Rhode Island high school for at least one year; continues to reside in the State of Rhode Island; has graduated from an approved Rhode Island high school or received a high school equivalency diploma from the State of Rhode Island; and has filed, or will file, upon matriculation, with the Rhode Island public university, college, or community college of expected attendance, the appropriate exemption request.

***Health Care Workforce:** The FY 2027 budget includes \$5.0 million for the first year of planning and startup costs associated with opening a medical school at the University of Rhode Island. Legislation did not pass that would have appropriated \$2.7 million to fund the primary care training sites program or that would have expanded the health professional loan repayment program to health care providers practicing in primary care settings. Legislation that would have raised Medicaid rates for pediatric care from 100% to 130% of the Medicare rate did not pass.

Health Care Protections: Legislation passed requiring health care providers and health care facilities to inform patients about the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to document a patient's visit and establishing regulations regarding the use of AI in mental health care treatments. Legislation did not pass that would have created the *Sensitive Healthcare Information Privacy Act*, protecting reproductive and gender-affirming data. Legislation also did not pass that would have protected additional classes of individuals (e.g., based on their language, sexual orientation, or gender identity) from health care discrimination and protected against additional forms of discrimination.

***Mental Health:** The FY 2027 budget includes \$1.2 million in general revenue funding for RI MomsPRN and PediPRN, ensuring that both programs can continue to operate. Language authorizing the Department of Health to oversee these programs was included in the budget. Legislation also passed establishing the statewide Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) program to provide rapid crisis response and short-term stabilization for children and youth up to age 21 in their homes, schools, and other community settings and requiring that reimbursement rates be equal to or greater than the prevailing integrated state Medicaid rate. The FY 2027 budget includes \$4.6 million (\$1.0 million from general revenue) to support the state's 9-8-8 crisis and suicide hotline.

HealthSource RI: The FY 2027 budget includes \$22 million for a premium subsidy program to help individuals who purchase health insurance through HealthSource RI, Rhode Island's health exchange, with a stated priority of helping individuals with incomes less than 200% FPL. Legislation did not pass that would have authorized the Rhode Island Division of Taxation to provide HealthSourceRI contact information for Rhode Islanders who reported that they were uninsured on their RI state income tax return.

Birth Options: The FY 2027 budget included \$1.6 million to help keep the Newport Birthing Center open. Legislation that would have required private insurers and Medicaid to cover the services of Licensed Certified Professional Midwives did not pass.

Health

VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ \$1.2 million allocated to sustain both the MomsPRN and PediPRN programs.*
- ◆ Mobile Response Stabilization Services formally established to provide rapid crisis response and short-term stabilization services to children and youth under age 21.
- ◆ Vaccine access protected.
- ◆ \$22 million for a premium subsidy program to help individuals who purchase health insurance through HealthSource RI.

Lactation Support: Legislation did not pass that would have required private insurers and Medicaid to cover the services of licensed certified lactation counselors.

Lead Poisoning: Legislation passed requiring labs performing blood lead analyses of a child under six to perform the test regardless of the child or child's parent's ability to pay and at no cost to the child or child's parent or guardian. Legislation did not pass that would have weakened the protections of the Lead Rental Registry for families, making some information private and allowing landlords not to register their properties if there were no children or pregnant individuals in the unit.

Vaccines: Legislation passed that requires insurance to cover vaccines recommended by the Rhode Island Department of Health, without cost-sharing requirements, and protecting health care providers' ability to discuss scientifically-sound vaccine recommendations with patients in accordance with the standard of care.

Safety

VICTORIES FOR CHILDREN AT-A-GLANCE

- ◆ The FY 2027 budget requires DCYF to conserve all benefits for a child in foster care receiving SS, SSI, veterans' benefits or railroad retirement benefits.
- ◆ Legislation passed to create a special legislative study commission to study current practices of Juvenile Hearing Boards and make recommendations for revisions to state law.

DCYF Budget: The FY 2027 budget provides \$410 million for the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) budget with \$2 million of general revenue to be used solely for infrastructure and capacity building activities necessary to comply with Medicaid transformation requirements and utilize federal matching dollars where possible.

DCYF Powers and Scope: Legislation passed that adds staff of day camps and residential camps for youth to the definition of "person responsible for a child's welfare" within the chapter on abused and neglected children. Legislation did not pass that would have given DCYF responsibility for overseeing and administering comprehensive behavioral health services for children with serious emotional disturbances and children with developmental or functional disabilities.

Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCP): The FY 2027 budget codifies the current FCCP regional service coverage policy of DCYF for five catchment areas. DCYF contracts with one FCCP provider in each defined region of the state to provide critical prevention resources.

Codifying these requirements ensures that DCYF can continue Medicaid reimbursement for this service when it implements a new Medicaid rate payment method in the coming years.

OCA Budget: The FY 2027 budget provides \$2.4 million for the Office of the Child Advocate funding 13 FTEs.

Protecting Foster Youth SSI Benefits: The FY 2027 budget requires DCYF to conserve all benefits for a child in foster care receiving SS, SSI, veterans' benefits or railroad retirement benefits, to manage the accounts, and keep child eligible for future benefits. Starting at age 14, DCYF must also provide youth with financial literacy training and support, including specific information regarding the existence, availability, and use of funds conserved for the child. Financial literacy program and support services will be developed in consultation with DCYF's statewide SPEAK Advisory Board and the Office of the General Treasurer.

Parental Incarceration: Legislation did not pass that would have required the courts to consider parental status of a defendant at time of sentencing and unless the parent poses a significant risk to the community that outweighs the harm of a parent's absence from their child's life, to issue a sentence that does not include imprisonment. Legislation did not pass that requires the Department of Corrections to provide free communication services to individuals held in their facilities.

Adoption and Legal Guardianship: Legislation did not pass that would have established the rights of adoptive/foster children or those in guardianship to have post-separation visitation with their siblings.

ID for Minors: Legislation did not pass that would have allowed a minor between the ages of 14 and 17 who is 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 as well as a certified copy of their birth certificate at no cost.

Gun Safety: Legislation did not pass that would restrict the possession of prohibited firearms.

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 prohibit a peace officer from employing threats, physical harm, deprivation, deception, coercion, or psychologically manipulative interrogation tactics during the custodial interrogation of a juvenile.

Juvenile Restraints: Legislation did not pass that would have prohibited handcuffing children 12 or younger at

initial police contact (unless needed for public safety or if the child is using or threatening physical force against an officer).

Juvenile Hearing Boards (JHBs): Legislation passed to create a 19-member special legislative study commission whose purpose would be to study current practices of municipal Juvenile Hearing Boards, to identify best practices, evaluate statewide coordination and board member training opportunities, examine appropriate methods of data collection and reporting standards, and provide recommendations to the Senate for revisions to state law. Legislation did not pass that would have automated referrals to the JHBs for first-time misdemeanor offenses and established a full-time statewide Juvenile Hearing Board Coordinator.

Minimum and Maximum Age for Youth at the Training School: Legislation did not pass that would have prohibited the incarceration (pre-trial detention or sentencing) of children ages 12 or younger 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). Legislation also did not pass that would have increased the upper age limit of youth who could be served by the youth justice system to age 21.

Youth in Adult Court: Legislation did not pass that would have removed the requirement that any person 16 years of age or older who has been found delinquent for having committed two offenses after the age of 16 would be automatically certified to adult court. Legislation also did not pass that would prohibit a sentence of life without parole upon any person age 21 or younger.

Immigration

Misdemeanor Sentencing: Legislation passed reducing the maximum sentence for a misdemeanor offense from 365 days to 364 days. This change helps ensure that minor offenses do not result in severe immigration consequences, such as detention or deportation, that can separate immigrant families and disrupt communities.

Federal Constitution Defense Act: Legislation passed establishing the *Rhode Island Federal Constitution Defense Act*. The law creates a legal pathway for individuals to seek relief when rights protected under the U.S. Constitution are violated by government entities or officials and provides additional protections against federal overreach.

Protect Our Courts: Legislation passed protecting individuals attending or traveling to and from Rhode Island court proceedings from civil arrest without a valid judicial warrant. The law helps ensure access to the courts, establishes enforcement procedures, and provides remedies for violations.

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

+Raising RI Coalition priority. Please see raisingri.org for more information.

^RI Afterschool Network priority. Please see riafterschool.org for more information.

~Anti-Racist Education Policy Collaborative priority. Please see rikidscount.org/education for more information.

Fiscal Year 2027 Budget

The Rhode Island General Assembly enacted an FY 2027 budget in the amount of \$15.2 billion. The budget consists of \$6.1 billion in state general revenue, \$5.7 billion in federal funds, \$465 million in restricted receipts, and \$3.0 billion in other funds.



D❤️NATE

*Please consider
supporting this
continued work.
Thank you!*



*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
P.O. Box 8081
Cranston, RI 02920*

*Phone: (401) 351-9400
rikids@rikidscount.org
www.rikidscount.org*

