

2020 -- H 7345

LC004080

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2020

A N A C T

RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES - THE RHODE ISLAND WORKS PROGRAM

Introduced By: Representatives Morin, Williams, Vella-Wilkinson, Amore, and O'Brien

Date Introduced: January 29, 2020

Referred To: House Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Legislative declaration.

2 (a) The general assembly finds and declares that:

3 (1) The stress caused by living in poverty can inhibit young children's early brain  
4 development and negatively impact children's ability to succeed in school and to develop the  
5 social-emotional skills needed to succeed as an adult;

6 (2) One study found that children experiencing poverty between birth and age five (5)  
7 completed two (2) fewer years of school and were nearly three (3) times more likely to be in poor  
8 health as adults;

9 (3) Rhode Island families of all backgrounds work hard to provide a better life for their  
10 children. However, poverty rates among children in Rhode Island vary by race and ethnicity as a  
11 result of policies and practices that have created and maintained inequitable opportunities in areas  
12 such as housing and employment;

13 (4) In 2018, roughly one hundred sixty-five thousand (165,000) children in Rhode Island  
14 were experiencing extreme poverty in families whose income was fifty percent (50%) below the  
15 federal poverty level, or about twelve thousand seven hundred thirty-three dollars (\$12,733) a  
16 year for a family of four (4) with two (2) children;

17 (5) Basic cash assistance is the most targeted approach Rhode Island can take to reducing  
18 extreme childhood poverty, which has a lifelong impact on a child's well-being;

19 (6) Income supports, such as basic cash assistance, are one important strategy to decrease

1 the number of children experiencing poverty and should be combined with work and other  
2 supports to lift children and families out of poverty;

3 (7) The purchasing power of the basic cash assistance in Rhode Island has not kept up  
4 with the cost of living because it has not been adjusted for inflation since 1991;

5 (8) As housing costs have continued to increase in Rhode Island, basic cash assistance  
6 has not kept up and is far below the cost of rent for a family. The average rent for a two (2)-  
7 bedroom apartment is almost three (3) times the amount of the monthly cash assistance benefit  
8 for a family with one adult and two (2) children.

9 (b) Therefore, it is the intent of the general assembly to adjust the amount of basic cash  
10 assistance to make up for the lack of adjustment for inflation and to lift families out of deep  
11 poverty (fifty percent (50%) of the federal poverty guideline) over a two (2) year period. It is  
12 also the intent of the general assembly to implement an annual cost of living adjustment thereafter  
13 so the value of basic cash assistance does not continue to erode in future years.

14 SECTION 2. Section 40-5.2-11 of the General Laws in Chapter 40-5.2 entitled "The  
15 Rhode Island Works Program" is hereby amended to read as follows:

16 **40-5.2-11. Cash assistance.**

17 (a) A family or assistance unit found by the department to meet the eligibility criteria set  
18 forth in this chapter shall be eligible to receive cash assistance as of the date a signed written  
19 application, signed under a penalty of perjury, is received by the department.

20 (b) The family members or assistance unit shall be eligible for cash assistance for so long  
21 as they continue to meet the eligibility criteria outlined in accordance with this chapter. Parents  
22 and adult non-parent caretaker relatives receiving cash assistance shall be eligible so long as they  
23 meet the terms and conditions of the work requirements of § 40-5.2-12. An adult caretaker  
24 relative shall be eligible for assistance as a member of the assistance unit so long as he/she meets  
25 all the eligibility requirements of this chapter.

26 (c) The monthly amount of cash assistance shall be equal to the payment standard for the  
27 family minus the countable income of the family in that month. The department is authorized to  
28 reduce the amount of assistance in the month of application to reflect the number of the days  
29 between the first day of the month and the effective date of the application.

30 (d) A decision of the application for assistance shall be made or rejected by the  
31 department no later than thirty (30) days following the date submitted and shall be effective as of  
32 the date of application.

33 ~~(e) The payment standard is equal to the sum of the following: three hundred twenty-~~  
34 ~~seven dollars (\$327) (two hundred seventy seven dollars (\$277) for a family residing in~~

1 ~~subsidized housing) for the first person, one hundred twenty two dollars (\$122) for the second~~  
2 ~~person, one hundred five dollars (\$105) for the third person and eighty dollars (\$80) for each~~  
3 ~~additional person.~~

4 (e) Effective October 1, 2020, the payment standard for the assistance unit shall be no  
5 less than forty percent (40%) of the poverty guideline for the comparable assistance unit size as  
6 determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for calendar year 2020.  
7 Effective October 1, 2021, the payment standard for the assistance unit shall be no less than fifty  
8 percent (50%) of the poverty guideline for the comparable assistance unit size as determined by  
9 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for calendar year 2021. Thereafter, the  
10 payment standard shall be adjusted in October of each year to be no less than fifty percent (50%)  
11 of the poverty guideline for the comparable assistance unit size as determined by the U.S.  
12 Department of Health and Human Services for that calendar year.

13 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES - THE RHODE ISLAND WORKS PROGRAM

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1           This act would adjust the amount of basic cash assistance provided to families living in  
2 deep poverty over a two-year period, and would implement an annual cost of living adjustment so  
3 that value of basic cash assistance does not erode in the future.

4           This act would take effect upon passage.

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