

## Issue Brief

### CHILDHOOD POVERTY IN RHODE ISLAND: A STATISTICAL PROFILE

Children most at risk of not achieving their full potential are children who live in poverty. Poverty is related to all of the other KIDS COUNT indicators. Children who grow up in poor families are more likely to go without necessary food and clothing, live in substandard housing, experience preventable health problems that affect healthy development, and have unequal access to educational opportunities.

This *Issue Brief* provides a statistical profile of poor children in Rhode Island by presenting answers to commonly asked questions about childhood poverty and graphics illustrating key facts about Rhode Island's poor children.



#### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: RI CHILDHOOD POVERTY

*Q. How many children are there in Rhode Island, and of that total number, how many are living in poverty?*

**A.** There are 222,358 children under age 18 in Rhode Island. Of these, 18% (39,140) live below the federal poverty line.

*Q. Has the percentage of Rhode Island children living in poverty been increasing?*

**A.** In 1985, 20% of Rhode Island's children lived below the poverty level. Child poverty dropped down to 14% in 1990. The latest figures show that the child poverty rate has risen again to 18% as of 1997.

*Q. How does Rhode Island's child poverty rate compare to the child poverty rate in the nation and in New England?*

**A.** Rhode Island's childhood poverty rate of 18% ranks 23rd in the nation. The national childhood poverty rate is 21%. Rhode Island and Connecticut have the highest childhood poverty rates in New England.

*Q. Are young children more likely to be poor?*

**A.** Both nationally, and in Rhode Island, young children from birth through age five are the poorest age group. Thirty-six percent of Rhode Island's poor children are ages five and younger.



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT CHILDHOOD POVERTY IN RHODE ISLAND

**Q.** *What is the federal poverty line and how is it measured?*

**A.** The official federal poverty level is \$16,700 for a family of four, or \$13,880 for a family of three. The official poverty threshold was set by the federal government in 1963, and was based on the cost of a minimum diet for a family of four. The cost of food was multiplied by three, since at that time about one-third of the after-tax expenditures of families was spent on food. The poverty line is adjusted annually according to the increase in the Consumer Price Index.

**Q.** *Do Rhode Island's poor children live in the urban areas or throughout the state?*

**A.** Two-thirds of Rhode Island's poor children live in the five core cities of Providence, Pawtucket, Newport, Central Falls, and Woonsocket. In Providence 34% of the children are poor, in Central Falls 32%, in Woonsocket 21%, in Newport 20%, and in Pawtucket 15%. While childhood poverty is concentrated in the urban communities, there are poor children in every city and town.

**Q.** *What is the racial and ethnic breakdown of Rhode Island's poor children?*

**A.** Nearly three-quarters of Rhode Island's poor children are white, yet African American, Hispanic, and Native American children are three times more likely to be living in poverty. Of Rhode Island's Black children, 43% live in poverty, and 43% of Rhode Island's Hispanic children live in poverty.

**Q.** *Do most poor children live in single-parent families?*

**A.** Nearly three-quarters of Rhode Island's poor families live in single female-headed households; 14% live in two-parent families; and about 7% live with their father only.

**Q.** *In addition to family structure, what other factors place children at risk for being poor?*

**A.** Children born to teen mothers are very likely to live in poverty. Also, since poverty results from low wages and/or lack of stable employment, the educational attainment of the parent(s) is also an important factor. Families living with incomes close to the poverty line are vulnerable to falling below the poverty line due to changes in marital status, illness, or disability.



## FAMILY INCOME LEVELS BASED ON THE FEDERAL POVERTY LINE

The federal poverty line is \$13,880 for a family of three. Many government assistance programs for low-income people now use income eligibility thresholds that are above the federal poverty line to help families meet their basic needs. For example, families earning up to \$25,678 per year (185% of the federal poverty level) qualify for Food Stamps, families earning up to \$27,760 qualify for child care subsidies, and families earning up to \$34,700 qualify for RItE Care. These figures are adjusted upward for larger family sizes.

|          | <b>Federal Poverty Level<br/>(FPL)</b> | <b>Annual Income<br/>Family of Three</b> |
|----------|--|--|
| 100% FPL | \$13,880                               | \$16,700                                 |
| 130% FPL | \$18,044                               | \$21,710                                 |
| 185% FPL | \$25,678                               | \$30,895                                 |
| 200% FPL | \$27,760                               | \$33,400                                 |
| 250% FPL | \$34,700                               | \$41,750                                 |

**CHILDREN ENROLLED IN THE FAMILY INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM (FIP)  
RHODE ISLAND, DECEMBER 1, 1998**

| City/Town          | Estimated Children Under 18 | Number Receiving FIP Cash Assistance Families | FIP Children | FIP Children As % of All Children Under 18 |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|---|--------------|--|
| Barrington         | 3,582                       | 27  | 44           | 1.2%                                       |
| Bristol            | 4,520                       | 138   | 229          | 5.1%                                       |
| Burrillville       | 4,039                       | 93  | 182          | 4.5%                                       |
| Central Falls      | 5,681                       | 911   | 1,795        | 31.6%                                      |
| Charlestown        | 1,707                       | 43  | 74           | 4.3%                                       |
| Coventry           | 7,317                       | 204   | 317          | 4.3%                                       |
| Cranston           | 15,361                      | 963   | 1,593        | 10.4%                                      |
| Cumberland         | 6,362                       | 145   | 245          | 3.9%                                       |
| East Greenwich     | 2,535                       | 55  | 88           | 3.5%                                       |
| East Providence    | 10,620                      | 593   | 989          | 9.3%                                       |
| Exeter             | 1,481                       | 23  | 37           | 2.5%                                       |
| Foster             | 1,091                       | 19  | 27           | 2.5%                                       |
| Glocester          | 2,239                       | 43  | 68           | 3.0%                                       |
| Hopkinton          | 1,855                       | 53  | 83           | 4.5%                                       |
| Jamestown          | 1,066                       | 15  | 19           | 1.8%                                       |
| Johnston           | 5,658                       | 332   | 545          | 9.6%                                       |
| Lincoln            | 3,854                       | 129   | 224          | 5.8%                                       |
| Little Compton     | 680                         | 9   | 12           | 1.8%                                       |
| Middletown         | 4,920                       | 100   | 166          | 3.4%                                       |
| Narragansett       | 2,949                       | 99  | 166          | 5.6%                                       |
| Newport            | 6,285                       | 540   | 1,057        | 16.8%                                      |
| New Shoreham       | 213                         | 4   | 6            | 2.8%                                       |
| North Kingstown    | 5,847                       | 230   | 369          | 6.3%                                       |
| North Providence   | 6,005                       | 390   | 657          | 10.9%                                      |
| North Smithfield   | 1,961                       | 26  | 38           | 1.9%                                       |
| Pawtucket          | 18,480                      | 2,032   | 3,744        | 20.3%                                      |
| Portsmouth         | 3,922                       | 55  | 90           | 2.3%                                       |
| Providence         | 45,240                      | 7,786   | 16,231       | 35.9%                                      |
| Richmond           | 1,638                       | 42  | 74           | 4.5%                                       |
| Scituate           | 2,218                       | 40  | 62           | 2.8%                                       |
| Smithfield         | 3,692                       | 60  | 89           | 2.4%                                       |
| South Kingstown    | 4,871                       | 120   | 222          | 4.6%                                       |
| Tiverton           | 2,781                       | 73  | 112          | 4.0%                                       |
| Warren             | 2,511                       | 109   | 205          | 8.2%                                       |
| Warwick            | 18,177                      | 781   | 1,245        | 6.8%                                       |
| Westerly           | 5,383                       | 254   | 460          | 8.5%                                       |
| West Greenwich     | 978                         | 22  | 38           | 3.9%                                       |
| West Warwick       | 7,194                       | 488   | 806          | 11.2%                                      |
| Woonsocket         | 11,330                      | 1,388   | 2,701        | 23.8%                                      |
| Core Cities        | 87,016                      | 12,657  | 25,528       | 29.3%                                      |
| Remainder of State | 149,219                     | 5,777   | 9,581        | 6.4%                                       |
| Rhode Island       | 236,234                     | 18,434  | 35,109       | 14.9%                                      |

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, INRHODES Database, December 1, 1998.

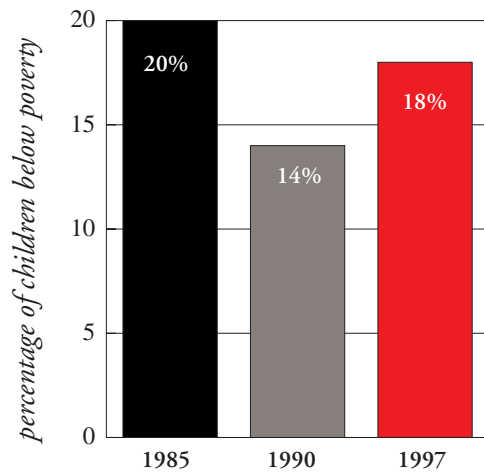
## LOW-INCOME SCHOOL CHILDREN, RHODE ISLAND 1990-1999

| City/Town           | Low-Income* School Children<br>1990-1991 |     | Low-Income* School Children<br>1998-1999 |     |
|---------------------|--|-----|--|-----|
|                     | N  | %   | N  | %   |
| Barrington          | 73                                       | 3%  | 73                                       | 3%  |
| Bristol-Warren      | 591                                      | 15% | 1,044                                    | 28% |
| Burrillville        | 445                                      | 15% | 573                                      | 21% |
| Central Falls       | 1,750                                    | 65% | 3,145                                    | 95% |
| Chariho             | 417                                      | 12% | 476                                      | 13% |
| Coventry            | 891                                      | 17% | 871                                      | 16% |
| Cranston            | 1,122                                    | 12% | 2,129                                    | 21% |
| Cumberland          | 352                                      | 8%  | 585                                      | 13% |
| East Greenwich      | 204                                      | 10% | 127                                      | 6%  |
| East Providence     | 1,312                                    | 21% | 2,030                                    | 33% |
| Exeter-W. Greenwich | 113                                      | 8%  | 236                                      | 13% |
| Foster              | 39                                       | 10% | 60                                       | 17% |
| Foster-Glocester    | 72                                       | 6%  | 120                                      | 8%  |
| Glocester           | 51                                       | 6%  | 134                                      | 19% |
| Jamestown           | 20                                       | 4%  | 46                                       | 8%  |
| Johnston            | 307                                      | 10% | 552                                      | 17% |
| Lincoln             | 161                                      | 6%  | 356                                      | 10% |
| Little Compton      | 20                                       | 6%  | 37                                       | 11% |
| Middletown          | 467                                      | 15% | 568                                      | 20% |
| Narragansett        | 255                                      | 14% | 253                                      | 14% |
| Newport             | 951                                      | 27% | 1,347                                    | 45% |
| New Shoreham        | 4  | 3%  | 8  | 6%  |
| North Kingstown     | 737                                      | 17% | 551                                      | 13% |
| North Providence    | 132                                      | 4%  | 717                                      | 22% |
| North Smithfield    | 103                                      | 6%  | 170                                      | 10% |
| Pawtucket           | 2,772                                    | 33% | 5,612                                    | 60% |
| Portsmouth          | 107                                      | 4%  | 180                                      | 7%  |
| Providence          | 12,127                                   | 58% | 19,827                                   | 79% |
| Scituate            | 90                                       | 6%  | 150                                      | 9%  |
| Smithfield          | 121                                      | 5%  | 169                                      | 7%  |
| South Kingstown     | 690                                      | 21% | 465                                      | 12% |
| Tiverton            | 186                                      | 9%  | 400                                      | 19% |
| Warwick             | 1,072                                    | 9%  | 2,091                                    | 19% |
| Westerly            | 332                                      | 11% | 616                                      | 19% |
| West Warwick        | 748                                      | 19% | 1,183                                    | 35% |
| Woonsocket          | 2,212                                    | 33% | 3,565                                    | 57% |
| Core Cities         | 19,812                                   | 47% | 33,496                                   | 71% |
| Remainder of State  | 11,234                                   | 12% | 16,970                                   | 17% |
| Rhode Island        | 31,046                                   | 23% | 50,466                                   | 35% |

*\*Low-Income is defined here as school-age children living in families with income below 185% of the federal poverty line (\$25,678 for a family of three).*

*Source: RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 1990-1991 and 1998-1999 free and reduced price lunch enrollment. 1990-1991 numbers as cited in Results: Education in Rhode Island (1999). Providence: RI Public Expenditure Council.*

## RHODE ISLAND CHILD POVERTY TRENDS, 1985, 1990, 1997



◆ In 1985, 20% of Rhode Island's children lived below the poverty line (\$13,880 for a family of three). From 1985 to 1990, the percentage of Rhode Island children in poverty decreased to 14% and rose again to 18% by 1997.

◆ Two-thirds of Rhode Island's poor children live in the five core cities of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Newport and Woonsocket.

## YOUNG CHILDREN IN POVERTY

In 1997 one in five Rhode Island children under age 6 were living in poverty (14,087 children). Of all poor children, 36% were under age 6. Research shows that the quality of a child's environment and social interactions in the early years affect brain development, producing lifelong impacts on learning, social skills, and mental health. The experience of poverty has particularly damaging effects in early childhood. Young children in poverty are more likely to experience delays in their physical, cognitive, language, and emotional development, which in turn affects their readiness for school.

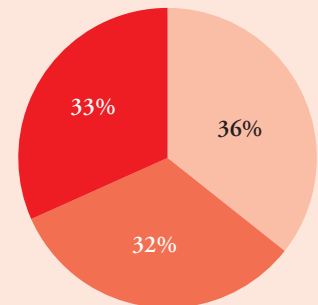
Young children born into poverty are more likely to...

- be born low birthweight;
- die in infancy or early childhood;
- be hospitalized during childhood;
- experience hunger and malnutrition;
- be victims of or witnesses to violence;
- be exposed to environmental toxins.

## RHODE ISLAND'S POOR CHILDREN, 1997

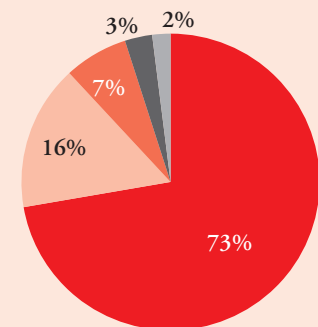
### By Age

|     |                  |
|-----|------------------|
| 36% | Ages 5 and Under |
| 33% | Ages 6 to 11     |
| 32% | Ages 12 to 17    |



### By Race\*

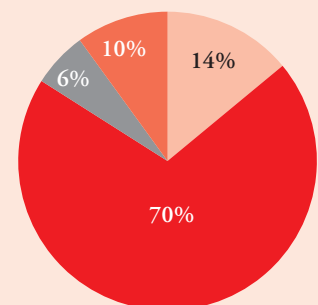
|     |                 |
|-----|-----------------|
| 73% | White           |
| 16% | Black           |
| 7%  | Asian           |
| 2%  | Native American |
| 3%  | Other           |



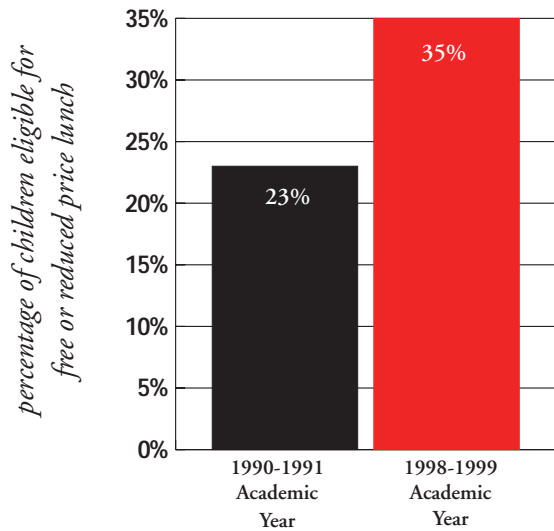
\*Hispanic children may be included in any race category. Of Rhode Island's 39,040 poor children, 28.5% are Hispanic.

### By Family Structure

|     |             |
|-----|-------------|
| 14% | Two Parents |
| 70% | Mother Only |
| 6%  | Father Only |
| 10% | Other       |



## RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL CHILDREN WHO QUALIFY FOR SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM 1990-1998



- ◆ The percentage of low-income school children has increased significantly since 1990 as evidenced by the increase in the number of children who qualify for free and reduced price lunch.
- ◆ Between 1990 and 1998, the percentage of Rhode Island students ages 5 to 18 living in families with incomes below 185% of the federal poverty level has increased from 23% of all students (31,719) to 35% of all students (50,466).

## REFERENCES

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