

# The Providence Journal

## Advocates say R.I. spending for aid to women has plunged

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In 2005, Rhode Island spent \$56.1 million to help low-income working parents pay for child daycare. Five years later, that figure has dwindled by 89 percent, to \$6.2 million, according to a report being released today by the Poverty Institute and the Women's Fund of Rhode Island.

Also diminished is state spending to track down parents who are supposed to pay child support, and state spending on health care for low-income children, parents and pregnant women.

And state spending on cash assistance for low-income workers who lose their jobs and do not qualify for unemployment insurance is down to zero, according to the report. Some federal money still gets funneled to the program, but total spending is down nearly 62 percent since 1998.

In all these cases, the people hardest hit by the budget cuts are working mothers and their children, the report's authors say.

The report does not offer a solution, but the authors say they hope to bring attention to the cuts — and the impact — in time to get people talking before the November election.

“One of the cruel ironies is that as today's stagnant wages and record unemployment have left more women and families in need of help, the report shows less government assistance is available,” said Kate Brewster, executive director of the Poverty Institute. “We do hope that with the elections coming up that there would be a renewed commitment to restore the investments that have eroded.”

Marcia Coné, executive director of the Women's Fund, said the trend of cuts is especially troubling in light of the goal of the programs, which was to help move women toward “economic self-sufficiency.” Instead, the cuts are having a synchronistic effect, with cutbacks in one area causing problems in another. For instance, she said, cutting daycare money only makes it harder for low-income women with children to go out and work.

“You can't go to work if you need to be at home watching your children,” she said.

The report also backs up the idea that working women do not fare as well as working men. Women in Rhode Island earned 74.2 cents for every dollar earned by men in 2008, the report says. And it suggests that the need for government programs to help low-income women is great. One-third of all single-mother families have incomes below the federal poverty level, and that

number rises 42 percent for black women and nearly 60 percent for Latina women, the report says.

Coné said it made sense for the Women's Fund and the Poverty Institute to team up on the report because they both share an interest in the economic self-sufficiency of women.

The report is scheduled for release at 10 a.m. news conference at the Rhode Island Foundation, 1 Union Station, Providence.

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