

Office of Child Support Staff Reductions Weaken Enforcement Capabilities

May 2010

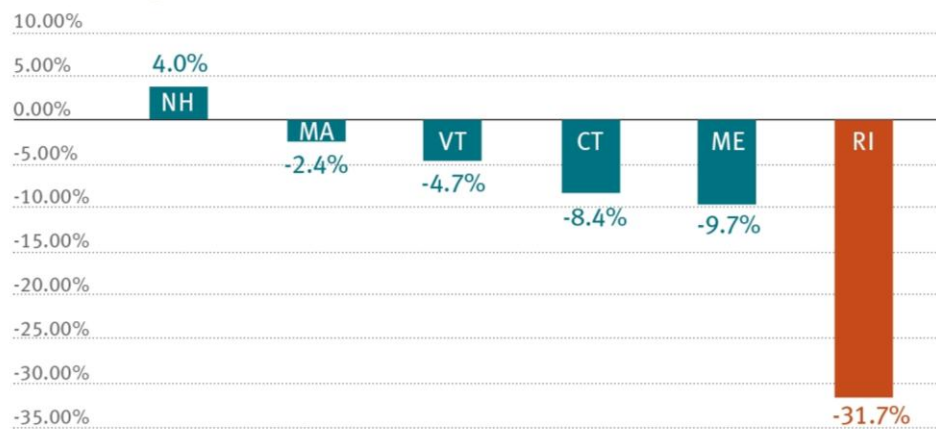
The Child Support program, operated by the Office of Child Support Services, is vitally important to tens of thousands of Rhode Island single parent families. The agency is responsible for 1) locating noncustodial parents, 2) establishing paternity, 3) establishing child support and medical support orders and 4) enforcing and collecting on these child and medical support orders.

Child support supplements low earnings and helps families weather a job loss or other financial crisis. In addition, child support reduces welfare use. Studies have shown that parents receiving cash assistance who also receive regular child support payments are more likely to find work faster and to stay employed longer than those who do not.¹

State investments in the child support enforcement program are cost effective. For every dollar the state spends, it collects \$5.65 in child support and “cash medical” to distribute to families or reimburse the state for public assistance received by the family. Moreover, the federal government reimburses sixty-six percent of the administrative costs of operating the program.

As Chart 6 shows, reductions in staff and high caseloads weaken the ability of child support enforcement to establish orders and collect support for families. The chart below shows the percentage of child support staff changes in each of the New England states between 2006 and 2008. Rhode Island is clearly an outlier, losing close to one-third of its staff during this three year period. This loss was three times worse than Maine, which lost the next highest percentage of workers.

6 | Rhode Island Suffered Worst Child Support Staff Losses in New England (2006-2008)



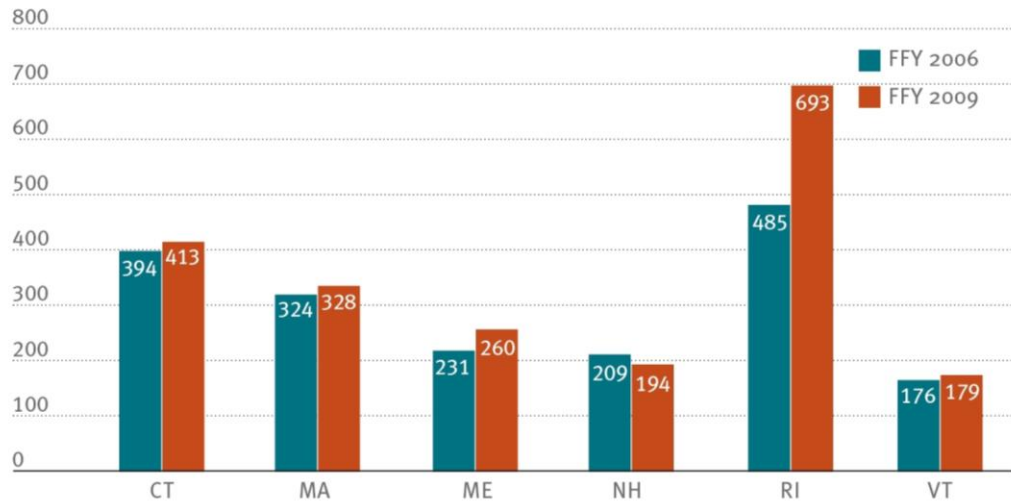
Percent Change in Full Time Equivalent Staff FY 2006 - FY 2008

Source: US Dept of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement, FY2008 and FY2006 Preliminary Reports, Poverty Institute calculations

This brief is taken from “An Uneven Path: State Investments in Women’s Economic Self Sufficiency” by The Poverty Institute and the Women’s Fund of Rhode Island, April 2010. To read the full report, go to www.povertyinstitute.org

As the child support agency suffered staff losses, caseloads per worker soared, as depicted in Chart 7. Rhode Island child support cases per full-time worker, at a ratio of 693:1, are by the far the highest in New England.

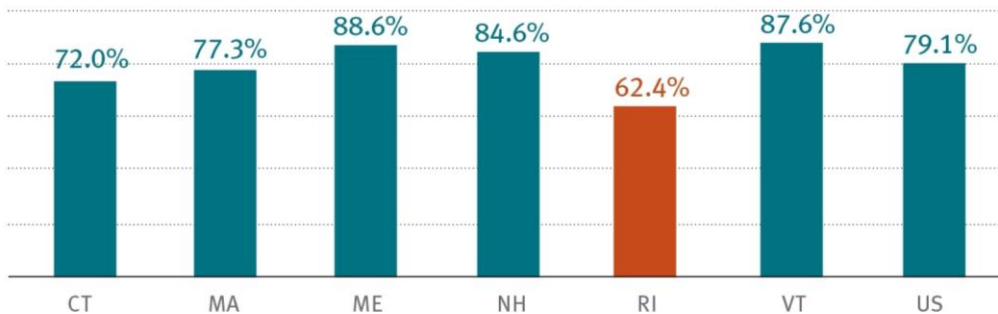
7 | Rhode Island's Case to Full Time Equivalent Staff Ratio is Highest in New England and Getting Worse



Source: US Dept of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement, FY2008 and FY2006 Preliminary Reports, Poverty Institute calculations

As a result, Rhode Island has the lowest percentage of cases with child support orders in New England. At sixty-two percent, this rate is well below the national average of seventy-nine percent (Chart 8).

8 | Rhode Island Has the Lowest Percentages of Cases with Child Support Orders in New England (Federal Fiscal Year 2008)



Source: US Dept of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement, FY2008 Preliminary Reports

ⁱ Vicki Turetsky, July 2007 Presentation: Child Support: Preserving and Expanding a Decade of Programs, CLASP. Citing Urban Institute analysis of the March 2006 Current Population Survey.

This brief is taken from "An Uneven Path: State Investments in Women's Economic Self Sufficiency" by The Poverty Institute and the Women's Fund of Rhode Island, April 2010. To read the full report, go to www.povertyinstitute.org