



RI NOW Testimony is Support of Restoring Budget Cuts RE: Articles 16, 17, and 20

**Submitted to the House Finance Committee
March 13, 2007**

The Rhode Island National Organization for Women is here today as a member of the One Rhode Island coalition. We are here because many of the proposed cuts to the budget would have a disproportionate impact on women. It is for this reason that we see these cuts as an issue of economic justice for women in Rhode Island.

It is important to view these potential cuts within the larger context of how women are fairing economically in our state. The Women's Fund of Rhode Island recently released a Mid-Decade Report on the Status of Women and Girls in Rhode Island. According to this report:

- While Rhode Island had the highest rate of female labor force growth in New England from 2000-2005, the rate of women in poverty increased during this same period.
- Women in Rhode Island are far more likely to be poor than men and have the second highest poverty rates in New England.
- Poverty rates for women who are the heads of their households are extremely high, with nearly 43% of all female-headed households living in poverty in Rhode Island.
- Women's earnings in Rhode Island continue to be hampered by several factors, including the fact that women still earn only 84.3% for every dollar men earn, they are overrepresented in jobs that don't pay well, and because so many women work part time, often because of the need to juggle work with primary care giver responsibilities.

The proposed cuts to childcare subsidies are alarming. Rolling back eligibility from including families that earn 225% of the federal poverty level to those that are at 150% would pull the rug out from under many Rhode Island women who are working hard to support their families, potentially creating a crisis that could cause them to have to drop out of the workforce and become reliant on other public support systems.

It is common sense to realize that women need affordable, quality childcare in order to be able to work. Rolling back eligibility for the child care subsidy will make it nearly impossible for women who are trying to do the right thing: support their families by making a living. When you couple the proposed roll backs in eligibility with the proposed cuts to payments to child care providers, you begin to dismantle a child care system that so many RI families have come to depend on, because some child care providers will have to close their doors. And, of course, most of these child care providers are women as well.

With respect to child support, it is important to remember that families that participate in the Family Independence Program are overwhelmingly headed by women, and that child support, as minimal as it may be, is essential to the economic stability of families that have separated, in some cases due to domestic violence. The proposal to cut in half (from \$50 to \$25) the child support that is passed through to families on FIP will affect 1/3 of the families. These families receive so little support as it is. Rhode Island should be moving in the direction of *increasing* the amount of child support that it passes through to families, not decreasing it.

And finally, increasing co-pays to elder and disabled Medicaid recipients is just another example of how these proposed cuts disproportionately affect women. These Rhode Islanders who will be affected are primarily people who have not worked and therefore do not have social security accounts – more often than not, women.

RI NOW's mission is to work to ensure that women are able to participate fully in all aspects of public and private life without experiencing barriers based on their gender. Because the proposed cuts disproportionately affect women, we view these cuts as a significant barrier to women who need childcare and income supports to enable them to be productive members of the workforce, primary caregivers, and valued citizens.

For all of the reasons stated above, I urge you not to turn your backs on women in this state. I ask you, on behalf of RI NOW and the One Rhode Island Coalition to restore these cuts.

Respectively submitted,

Carolyn Mark, President
RI NOW