



RISES
Rhode Islanders for Social
and Economic Security

PRESS RELEASE
February 15, 2006

**CONCERNED RHODE ISLANDERS SPEAK OUT AGAINST
UNFAIR BUDGET**

Concerned citizens, religious leaders, and community groups gathered at the State House today to urge the General Assembly to reject what they called an unfair budget that cuts programs vital to working families, children, elders and people with disabilities.

The Governor's budget would force 10,000 low-income children and adults off of RIte Care immediately and result in many more children losing health coverage due to an increase in monthly premiums which are already the third highest in the country. These same low-income working families would also be required to pay more for child care. A parent with 2 children earning \$25,000 would lose RIte Care coverage and need to pay \$720 more per year to keep child care and RIte Care coverage just for her children.

"At the recent National Prayer breakfast, the rock-star Bono said that one thing all faiths can agree on is 'that God is with the vulnerable and the poor' said Rabbi Alan Flam, President of the Board of Rabbis and member of the One RI Steering Committee. It is a good thing that God is with the poor, because after reading the 2007 budget proposal and understanding the combined impact of these cuts on children and working families, I worry that our elected officials are losing their sensitivity to the needs and concerns of our neighbors who are living on the economic margins."

Advocates expressed concern about the proposed changes to the Family Independence Program, Rhode Island's cash assistance program, which was created 10 years ago with broad-based, bi-partisan support. The program was designed to protect the state's poorest children while assisting parents obtain permanent employment. The FIP caseload has dropped by 35% while spending has dropped from \$55 to \$13 million. RI has done better than most states in keeping people in jobs after they leave welfare.

Deb Debare, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, claimed "The cuts to the Family Independence Program will dismantle a program that provides a safety net for victims of domestic violence and other vulnerable families. We are also very concerned about the cuts to health care and child care. Women from all walks of life have relied on these programs to provide them with the economic security they need to escape violence and keep themselves and their children safe."

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of RI Kids Count urged state policymakers not to reverse the progress that has been made for low-income working families. “RIte Care, the Family Independence Program, and child care assistance have been hailed as national models. Given the high levels of childhood poverty in Rhode Island, we should be doing more, not less, to help keep kids healthy, safe, and ready for school. Current state spending on FIP cash assistance of \$13 million is less than ½ of 1% of the state budget and the proposed budget would cut that by almost half, putting the poorest and most vulnerable children at further risk.”

In addition to taking away health insurance from low-income children and families, people with disabilities and elders with incomes twenty percent below the poverty level will have a co-pay for medications. “We have already seen how difficult it has been for people with higher incomes to pay for their medications as a result of Medicare’s new prescription drug plan,” said Elizabeth Earls, President of the RI Council of Community Mental Health Organizations. “It’s not uncommon for a person with serious mental illness to have numerous prescriptions to address the illness itself and accompanying side effects. Asking people with income below the poverty level to pay 3 – 5% of income for medications is unconscionable and will have disastrous consequences.”

Father Bernard Healey, Government Liaison for the Diocese of Providence said that “we are here today to reawaken the spiritual energy of this state house; to remind our leaders of the demands of justice. Justice demands that the budget support the needy and justice demands we offer hope to our children.”