

One Rhode Island' marshals support to fight budget cuts  
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02/11/2006

WOONSOCKET -- The One Rhode Island Coalition is marshaling supporters in Woonsocket to join its campaign to fight Gov. Donald Carcieri's proposed state budget cuts, which the coalition says will hurt working families and the state's most vulnerable residents -- children, elders and people with disabilities.

The coalition, which comprises more than 160 community, education, religious and social-service organizations, was in the city Friday to unveil its One Rhode Island Fiscal Year 2007 Legislative Platform to more than 70 people representing the city's many social service, religious, education and advocacy groups. The presentation at St. James Episcopal Church was sponsored by Family Resources Community Action.

The One Rhode Island Coalition advocates for public policies, resources and programs that ensure Rhode Islanders can meet their basic needs.

"It's going to be a real fight this year to keep the things we have," Kate Brewster, executive director of the Poverty Institute at Rhode Island College School of Social Work, told the gathering.

As it has done each of the past four years, the coalition released its annual legislative platform that describes programs to help needy Rhode Islanders. The platform proposes improvements and more money for programs to help people meet their basic needs. Over the years bills have been submitted by a number of legislators to implement these changes.

"Our legislative platform lists the things we need to help the poorest families in Rhode Island get by," said Brewster, who also teaches social policy and case management at the Rhode Island College School of Social Work.

The group's platform this year proposes, among other things, raising the minimum wage, increasing the federal earned income tax credit, continuing state funding for food stamp outreach, increasing funding for dental services to children, investing in an affordable energy plan, and investing \$7.5 million in the Neighborhood Opportunities Program.

The total cost of the group's legislative platform is \$20 million. But with the state facing a budget deficit of over \$230 million, Brewster concedes it will be an uphill battle. The more immediate concern, she said, is preserving existing services and programs that will be impacted by the governor's proposed budget.

"We're back to staving off cuts and focusing this year on fighting a long list of bad things," Brewster said. "We don't think \$20 million is an outrageous amount of money, but we're not very hopeful because of the deficit, but this is what we're committed to doing."

Brewster said Carcieri is proposing to make up the deficit by cutting mostly human service programs in the areas of health insurance, welfare and childcare. She called the cuts "ridiculous savings measures in the grand scheme of things."

Brewster said under Carcieri's budget:

- 6,800 working adults will lost their RItE Care health insurance. These are mostly low-wage workers who do not have health insurance at their jobs.
- 3,000 children who are not eligible for federal funding will lose their RItE Care health insurance, leaving them without access to primary and preventive care.

- 2,344 low-income families will have to pay a monthly premium of \$42 a month for RIte Care even though the parents will no longer be eligible for coverage.
- 5,000 families will have to pay more to cover their children through RIte Care, with monthly premiums increasing by \$20 per month to between \$80 and \$106 month.
- 14,000 elders and people with disabilities who receive SSI will have to pay a co-payment for medications.
- 3,000 families will lose \$25 in cash assistance benefits (a new rule will reduce benefits by \$25 if the family has received benefits for 25 months).
- Children and parents will be cut off of FIP if the parent has not complied with the employment plan for three months, affecting at least 400 families.
- Needy families will not be given any cash assistance for families in crisis and creating administrative inefficiencies.
- Benefits that a family has received in other states will be counted against the parents life time limit, causing 2,000 families to lose a portion of their benefits and denying parents access to work readiness services through DHS.
- 4,000 families will have to pay more for childcare.

"We're in a defensive mode and committed to getting these cuts restored in the budget," Brewster said.

"These cuts have serious implications that will impact people already living on the edge and will have a snowball effect on other programs and services," said Ben Lessing, executive director of Family Resources.