

# Benefit Cliff Mitigation in RHODE ISLAND

## THE SPARK

In 2014, Rhode Island embarked on a journey to mitigate benefit cliffs, driven by a progressive governor and a proactive department lead. This initiative was part of a broader, bipartisan effort led by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The state's commitment was solidified during a pivotal meeting in December 2019, where the governor publicly committed to legislative changes aimed at addressing benefit cliffs. This period of analysis and policy review from 2014 to 2019 laid the groundwork for significant reforms.

## INITIATIVES

### Post-Employment Benefits

Rhode Island introduced a pilot program to provide \$200 per month for up to 12 months to individuals transitioning from TANF to employment. This initiative aimed to cover additional costs associated with employment, such as transportation, helping to stabilize families during the transition. To be implemented in June 2026.

### Housing Stability

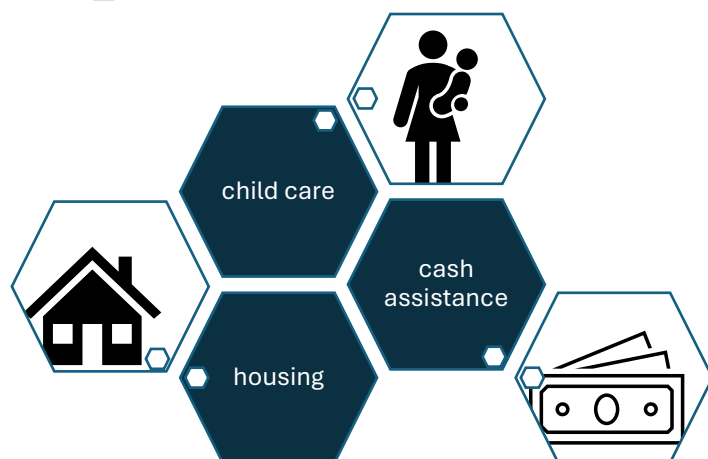
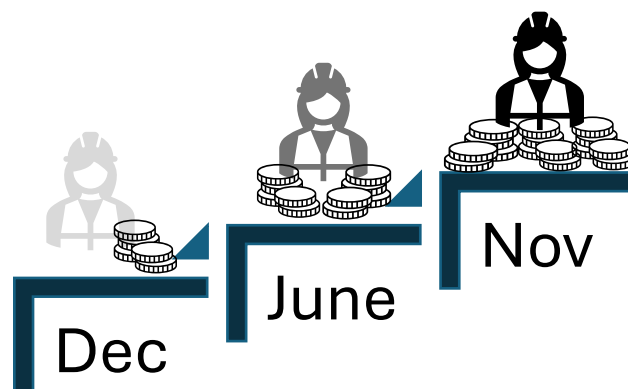
Using TANF block grant money, Rhode Island launched the Housing Stability Pilot to prevent evictions and assist with housing crises. This program provides non-recurring short-term benefits, including first month's rent, security deposits, and back rent payments. A goal is to help families maintain employment by relieving stressors of pending evictions and preventing a return to TANF.

### Child Care Expansion

Rhode Island significantly expanded its child care support, increasing eligibility from 125% to 261% of the FPL. This expansion was crucial in ensuring that working families could access affordable child care, thereby reducing the financial burden and supporting employment stability.

### Rhode Island Works (RI Works) Program

The RI Works program underwent substantial changes after the pandemic. For the first time in 15 years, six initiatives were included in the governor's budget, allowing the program to grow and better serve families. Among the changes was increasing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) grant by 20% in July 2024, with proposals to further increase it to 50% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Additional changes included disregarding the first \$525 of earned income and eliminating the full family sanction.



## RI Lesson Learned

Rhode Island implemented incremental changes and pilot programs to address benefit cliffs. Starting with smaller, manageable changes can help build momentum and demonstrate effectiveness.

## FINER DETAILS

### Funding

The initiatives were funded through a combination of state and federal resources. The TANF block grant played a significant role, particularly in funding the housing stability program. Additionally, the state leveraged philanthropic partnerships, such as those with the Kellogg Foundation, to support the Whole Family Approach to Jobs initiative.

### Key Collaborators

Rhode Island advanced these initiatives in large part because of the support of key partnerships. A few of their key collaborators included Economic Progress Institute (EPI), Kids Count, Foster Forward, United Way, and community agencies including numerous local agencies, such as Crossroads Rhode Island to address stability and Project Weber/RENEW, which worked closely with the state to address specific needs such as substance use disorders and homelessness.

## TIMELINE

Rhode Island advanced new initiatives at a steady pace:

