The mission of the Women’s Fund of Rhode Island is to invest in women and girls through research, advocacy and strategic partnerships designed to eliminate gender inequity through systems change.
As the new Executive Director for the Women’s Fund of Rhode Island (WFRI), I arrived just as the 2016 Presidential Election was happening. WFRI is a feminist organization interested in leveling the playing field for women and girls in Rhode Island, and so we were disappointed in the results of the election. This set the stage for 2017, giving us a renewed sense of mission. Our focus for this past year was about the importance of investing in women and girls, with our advocacy focused on:

- Earned sick time and increasing the minimum wage
- Reproductive access and freedom
- Affordable child care options for low income families through tiered rate structure

Our events for 2017 addressed these issues, beginning with the release of our latest research on working women our state and the barriers they face on the path to financial success. We introduced our popular Cocktails and Conversation networking events, featuring panel speakers with innovative ways to improve the status of women and girls. Our Women Leading Change Celebration included a keynote presentation by Jackie VanderBrug, internationally renowned speaker on the topic of Gender Lens Investing. We saw the passage of the Healthy and Safe Families and Workplaces Act, which gave over 45,000 RI employees up to three days of earned sick leave, many of them mothers who would otherwise lose a day’s pay to care for a sick child. 2017 also brought a return to grant making, with $50,000 distributed amongst six Rhode Island organizations addressing gender equity issues.

Of course, none of what we accomplished in 2017 could have happened without the support of our Board of Directors, volunteers and donors. Thank you for your generosity of time, talent and treasure! We look forward too many more accomplishments in 2018 with your help.

Sincerely,

Kelly Nevins
Executive Director
Women’s Fund of Rhode Island
Advocacy

The Women’s Fund of Rhode Island believes in creating systemic change, so that we can truly create gender equity in our state. Our advocacy work is critical, turning ideas into laws, citizens into lawmakers and observers into doers. WFRI actively supported the following legislation in 2017:

**Healthy and Safe Families and Workplaces Act**

H5413/S290 - This Act became law in September and will provide up to three earned sick days to over 45,000 Rhode Island employees who previously did not qualify for paid time off, many of whom are working mothers.

The law allows employees of companies with 18 or more employees to accrue a minimum of one hour of paid sick and safe leave for every 30 hours worked, up to a maximum of 24 hours per year in 2018. For a typical family without paid sick days, even a few unpaid days away from work can jeopardize their ability to pay bills or meet basic needs. For example, just 3.5 days of lost pay is equivalent to the monthly grocery budget of a typical family whose breadwinners lack paid sick days. And that assumes a breadwinner is able to return to work after taking the time away. Unfortunately, too often, people lose their jobs when they have to take time away from work. Nearly one in four adults in the US report that they have lost a job or been threatened with job loss for needing time away from work to address personal or family illness.

**Increases in the Minimum Wage**

H5057 - The typical worker earning the minimum wage is an adult woman and about 75% of minimum wage workers are over the age of 20. 42% of families are headed by a single female parent, many of whom work full time bringing in earnings of less than $15,000 per year. Raising the minimum wage reduces child poverty and benefits the broader economy. With an increase of $1 to the minimum wage, low wage worker households spend an additional $2,800 in the following year. We are pleased that Rhode Island’s minimum wage will increase from $9.60 to $10.10 in 2018 and we will continue to support the concept of a fair, living wage for low income workers.

**Fair Employment Practices, including banning wage history requirement for jobs**

S583 - According to the Association of American University Women, 40% of the gender wage gap can be considered discriminatory. This discrimination starts as women and men begin their careers, with women making less in the same role as men right out of the gate, when family caregiving responsibilities haven’t even begun. By not allowing wage history to determine a company’s wage offer, women have an opportunity to start at equal footing with their male counterparts in any job they take at any time of their career. Rather than using wage history, their new wage will be based on objective criteria such as experience and skill. Furthermore, wage range transparency helps all employees to better understand their opportunities for growth.

- H5435 - Repealing prohibition on health insurance coverage of abortion for state employees
- H5486 - Allowing full year prescriptions for birth control under state health insurance requirements
- H5830 - Repealing unconstitutional language in our General Laws requiring spousal notice for abortion
RESEARCH
WFRI engages in original research to understand and highlight the status of women and girls. Our goal is to provide unbiased information that can be used to address issues of gender equity. In 2017, we released the Status of Working Women in Rhode Island report and summary infographic. Insights included:

- RI has the second highest proportion of women in the labor force in the nation representing 49% of the state’s labor force, compared to Delaware, which was number one with 59%
- Nationally, 41.4% of mothers are the sole family breadwinners
- The median earning of Rhode Island women is $30,137
- 36% of women are working part time, but challenges prevent many from finding full time positions

The full report can be seen at http://www.wfri.org/research

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
WFRI conducted seven events engaging over 600 participants, including:

- **Making Work Work for Women** community input forums (3) focused on sharing the results of our latest research and inviting community feedback
- **Women Leading Business and Labor**, in partnership with Senator Jack Reed, highlighted how the business and labor community are addressing issues of workplace equity
- **Womenomics: Women Leading Change**, featuring speaker Jackie VanderBrug and a discussion on Gender Lens Investing
- **How Female Entrepreneurs Are Innovating in the Workplace**, featuring women led businesses and how they are changing the workplace
- **Creating Systems Change for Women and Girls** (2), highlighted innovative strategies for addressing equity issues in RI

We also conducted a Social Media Campaign, raising community awareness and participation through our #UNselfie Gender Equity campaign and regular postings to all social media sites.

WFRI was represented through its staff and volunteers as keynote speakers at more than a dozen events, and participated in seven televised interviews.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
Conducted two workshops engaging 75 participants:

- **Run As You Are** taught women how to run for office office, with two thirds of participants indicating they planned to run for office within the next five years
- **Growing Workplace Diversity to Amplify Success** addressed unconscious bias in the workplace

GRANT MAKING
2017 represented a return to grant making for WFRI after a 3 year hiatus. We granted $50,000 to six organizations addressing gender inequity in RI, including:

- **Young Voices**, to support the #RaiseOurVoices leadership training program for high school girls
- **RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence**, to support “RI Move to End Violence” training and collaborative activities for organizations addressing domestic violence
- **Center for Women & Enterprise**, to provide entrepreneurship training in Spanish to local women
- **Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education**, to support the “Hidden Lotus Girls Circle” program, teaching girls to develop caring relationships and self-esteem while advocating for themselves
- **Day One**, for their “Be Empowerment” program to help young survivors of commercial sexual exploitation heal and forge a new path with their community
- **YearUp**, for their Providence Women in Information Technology Careers program

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS
WFRI actively participated in strategic partnerships through collaborative planning processes and lobbying legislators for change.

- **Prosperity Together** (coalition of national Women’s Funds addressing economic issues through grant making)
- **Coalition for Reproductive Freedom**
- **Earned Sick Time Coalition**

Other Accomplishments:

- Raised $56,595, an increase of 52% over the previous year
- New donors increased by 89%
- Moved into new office space location on East Side of Providence, making the space cost effective and easier for volunteers to engage with staff

PRIORITIES FOR 2018:

- **Support for Fair Pay Practices**, including banning requirements for historical wage information, creating transparency in wage ranges and increasing the minimum wage*
- **Support for Reproductive Freedom**, including codifying Roe vs. Wade legislation in Rhode Island law
- **Freedom from Sexual Harrassment**
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2017 Total Income = $205,144

2017 Total Expenses = $198,548