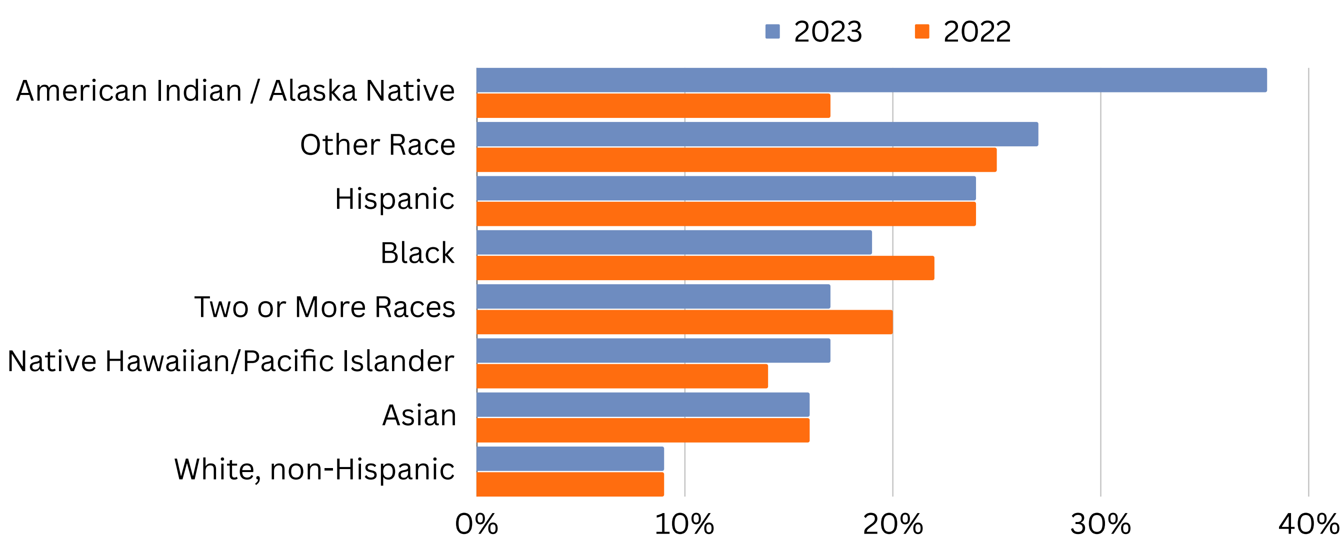
POVERTY

The [Rhode Island Women's Well-Being Index (WWBI)] provides access to publicly available data specific to local, regional, and statewide levels. It is aggregated for gender and race, when such data is available. Based on similar indexes used by other Women's Funds, the RI WWBI encompasses five dimensions--Education, Economic Security, Health & Safety, Housing, and Civic Engagement--each of which is made up of additional indicators.

This policy brief explores the latest data for the Economic Security Indicator, specifically the data that address poverty.

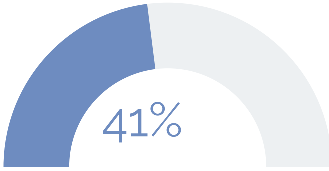
The Census Bureau uses a set of money-income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty. Although the thresholds in some sense reflect a family's needs, they are intended for use as a statistical yardstick, not as a complete description of what people and families need to live. For further information, we recommend readers review the Rhode Island Standard of Need, calculated and updated regularly by the Economic Progress Institute.

Female Poverty by Race/Ethnicity in Rhode Island

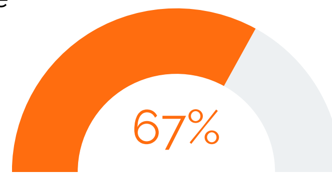


Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates, tables B17001B through B17001I

While RI typically has a small population of American Indian/Native Alaskan women from which we can pull census data, it is worth noting that women experiencing poverty in this group more than doubled since our last report. No other demographic group experienced a significant increase in percentage; the only two groups to see an increase were Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and those who identified as Other, both at 2%. Asian, Hispanic and White women experienced virtually no change in poverty levels. Black women actually experienced less poverty in this period by 3%, as did those who identified as two or more races, with a drop of 3.5%.



Black women experience poverty at a rate above 10% in 16 RI cities (in 41% of our cities).



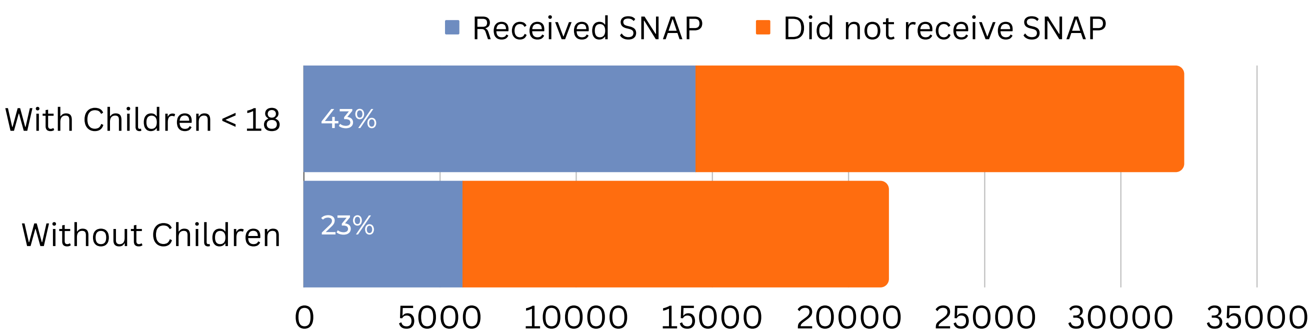
Hispanic/Latinx women experience poverty at a rate above 10% in 26 RI cities (in 67% of our cities).

However, Black women experience poverty at a rate above 10% in 16 cities and towns throughout Rhode Island, with South Kingstown being the highest. Hispanic/Latinx women experience poverty above 10% in 26 of them, with Providence being the largest concentration of population. In 30 cities and towns, the percentage of poverty experienced by women is more than 10%, again with South Kingstown having the highest percentage in poverty.

Federal Assistance

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federal assistance program administered by the states. It provides low-income Rhode Islanders with financial assistance to purchase food. SNAP does not, and is not intended to, cover all food costs for the month, and many households need to turn to food pantries to ensure they have sufficient food. Most SNAP participants in RI have incomes below the poverty line.

Female Head of Households Receiving SNAP Benefits



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates, table B22002

According to an analysis by the Center of Budget & Policy Priorities, in Federal Fiscal Year 2022, SNAP helped 139,400 Rhode Islanders, approximately 1 in 8 residents. More than 34% lived in working families, 52% lived in families with children, and almost 49% lived in families that included older adults or individuals with disabilities. These numbers are comparable with our previous report.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

We join with the Economic Progress Institute, RI Kids Count, and many other organizations in supporting policies that:

01 **Increase the minimum wage**

to a living wage which ensures that basic housing, food, clothing and other needs are met.

02 **Increase pay for caretakers**

especially childcare providers and direct care workers for older adults and people with disabilities.

03 **Increase the RI Works benefit**

and tie it to inflation for the annual cost-of-living increases.

04 **Expand and improve paid family leave**

by increasing individual benefit rates for lower wage workers and expanding the number of weeks.

05 **Increase the state earned-income tax credit**

to 30% of the federal credit, which will be comparable to levels in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

06 **Invest in early education workers**

by expanding the Real Jobs program to meet demand in the early childhood sector.

07 **Adopt continuous Medicaid coverage**

for children under age 6.

08 **Provide higher quality care for kids**

by expanding and strengthening the RI Child Care Assistance Program.

09 **Provide $3,000 in Baby Bonds**

for each baby born into a family on public health insurance, managed and invested by the RI Treasurer's office.