

# LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2021

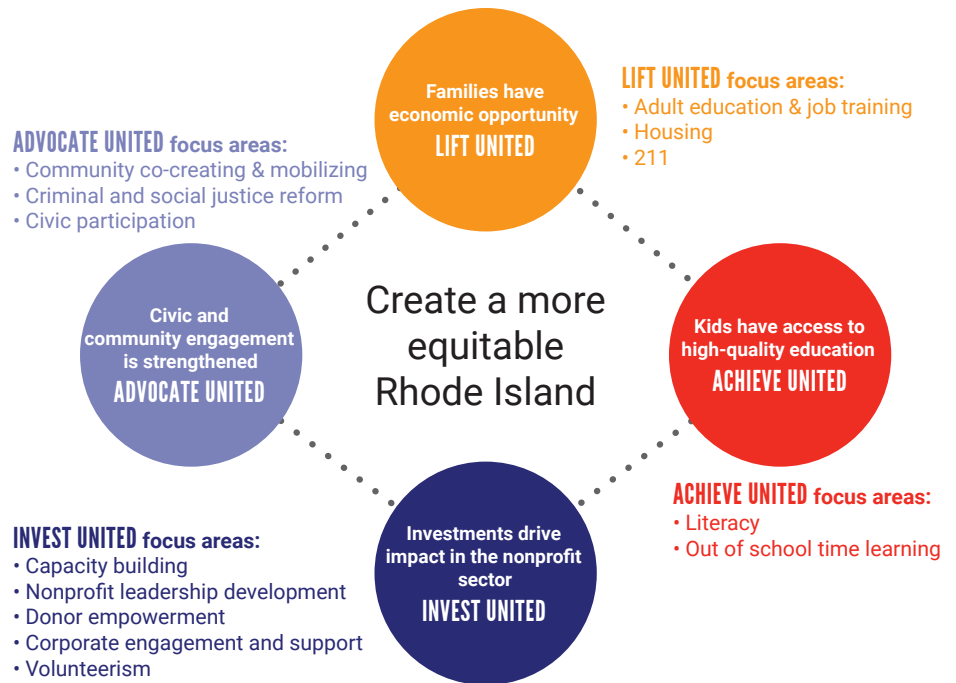


United Way of Rhode Island

## UNITED FOR A JUST AND EQUITABLE COMMUNITY

The LIVE UNITED 2025 strategic plan sets the agenda for United Way of Rhode Island's next five years from 2021 until 2025. The Strategic Plan is ambitious and clearly articulates our priorities in each of its four focus areas.

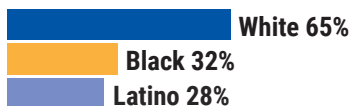
Our priorities through this plan begin with reducing or eliminating disparities for Black Indigenous Persons of Color (BIPOC) communities.



## HOUSING

Having a home is one of the most fundamental necessities of life. We must commit to making serious, long-term investments to ensure that all Rhode Islanders live in safe, healthy, affordable homes in thriving communities. United Way's long-term goal is to reduce the disparity in homeownership for BIPOC communities.

Home ownership in Rhode Island



Over the past decade, the cost of housing has outpaced earnings leaving nearly 50% of Rhode Islanders unable to afford the homes they live in. In 2020 when Rhode Island, like the rest of the world, came to a halt due to the pandemic, United Way of Rhode Island designed and lead the successful Yes on 3 campaign to provide \$65 million dollars to increase affordable housing production and preservation. This represents the largest housing bond in Rhode Island history. Yes on 3 was approved by 66% of Rhode Islanders. This is important as only 1 out of the 39 cities and towns in our state are considered affordable. (*HousingWorks RI*)

**We support increased state funding, that is both long term and consistent, for:**

- A permanent funding stream for affordable housing construction and preservation
- Eliminating discrimination for rental subsidies for low and very low-income households
- Necessary supportive services for those placed in permanent housing

**We also support:**

- The passage of Source of Income Anti-Discrimination Legislation
- The 2021 Special Election - \$65 million housing bond campaign for construction and preservation of affordable homes
- The removal of legal, administrative, regulatory, and economic barriers to quality housing
- The Homes RI Coalition, a member driven initiative that United Way helped to seed initial funding for, and continues to lead the policy work around effective and just affordable housing policy

## EDUCATION

We know that Rhode Islanders are impacted by the environment they live in, and they are impacted by the neighborhoods they live in. We are creating pathways for more youth of color to participate in high quality out-of-school time learning. We are also working to reduce the pathway to prison, using education as a key catalyst.

# 59,000

Rhode Island children who do not have access to out-of-school time learning programs

This year, we'll be campaigning to secure state funding for out-of-school time learning programs, specifically in areas with the greatest access needs. We will invest in and support programs focused on restorative justice practices, empowering young people, and trauma-informed care.

### **We support increased state funding that is both long term and consistent for:**

- \$8 million dollars to OSTL Programs and Providers from the \$23.5 million stimulus for Childcare and/or the Governors Emergency Education Relief Fund (*see resolutions passed in Cranston, Central Falls, and Providence*)
- Double the access to OSTL Programs especially for BIPOC youth. 59,000 youth, out of 150,000 youth in the entire state, are on waiting lists in Rhode Island trying to get into an Afterschool Program according to the America After 3 p.m. data released December 8, 2020 ([afterschoolalliance.org](https://afterschoolalliance.org))
- \$2 million in the 2022 budget under R.I. Department of Education for afterschool and summer learning programs.
- Representative Julie Casimiro filed [House Bill 5211](#) in January 2021 in support of a permanent OSTL Commission and Senator Sandra Cano, chair of the Education Committee supports this strategy and is prepared to submit companion legislation

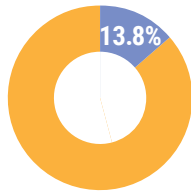
### **We also support:**

- To sustain a funding stream, we want to look at the tax revenue from the legalization of recreational marijuana. Alaska Afterschool Network was able to secure 25% of the tax revenue from recreation marijuana because OSTL programs are proven prevention programs for substance abuse. Some of that language is below:
  1. The Marijuana Education Program applies a shared risk and protective factor approach in the development and implementation of strategies to reduce substance use/misuse, and their associated harms. Individual, relationship, community and society level protective factors play an important role in preventing youth from using marijuana. For example, resiliency has been shown to be an individual-level protective factor, whereas family factors such as connectedness is a strong relationship-level protective factor for youth marijuana use prevention. Community and societal level protective factors include factors related to economic stability, social status, and community connectedness.
  2. Funding is allocated to support afterschool programs statewide to build protective factors related to substance misuse among youth in grades 5-8. To learn more about the Positive Youth Development Afterschool Program, visit [Alaska Afterschool Network](#).
  3. The Marijuana Education Program also provides resources to support school districts to deliver targeted trauma-engaged prevention activities to at-risk students to improve behavioral health issues. Resources are also provided to support justice-involved youth through a partnership with the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice.

# ADULT EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Poverty and deep poverty plague Rhode Island communities and the people who live in them particularly for BIPOC populations. The poverty rate for Black Rhode Islanders (21.5%) is more than twice as high as the rate for White Rhode Islanders (9.0%). The rate for Latinx Rhode Islanders (27.1%) is three times as high and for Asian Rhode Islanders (15.9%) the rate is not quite twice as high compared to White residents. We support adult education, job training, and business and job creation by women and members of BIPOC communities are essential components of our strategic plan.

Poverty rate in Rhode Island



## We support increased state funding, that is both long term and consistent, for:

- Lift 2,500 families out of deep poverty and increase the RI Works benefit amount from 30% to 50% of the federal poverty level starting October 2021. Benefits will then be adjusted to keep pace with inflation. The cash assistance paid to 2,500 families receiving RI Works benefits has not been raised in 30 years and is 30% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
- Expand access to adult education and job training programs, especially for multi-language learners. Ensure these programs train our neighbors for the livable wage jobs of tomorrow, as well as of today.
- Raising minimum wage to \$15 per hour and adjusting it to keep pace with inflation to achieve a livable wage for Rhode Islanders at the lower end of the income spectrum.
- Increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The current EITC is at 15% of the federal credit. UWRI supports an increase of the EITC to 20%. Through our Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA), a program designed to help low- and moderate-income taxpayers complete their annual tax returns at no cost, working families can access the EITC, a powerful tool in enhancing a family's financial stability. This year the federal government increased EITC via the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package. This will in essence increase the credit for RI families in the current year. We will work to make this increase permanent.

## We also support:

- Disaggregating data on the State of Rhode Island waitlist to determine which participants are English Language Learners (ELL) and need ELL courses (ELL) courses versus adult basic and ELL courses to better inform and prioritize registration.
- Support the growth and stability of businesses owned by women and minorities in Rhode Island, which in turn will drive economic growth in our state.

# JUSTICE REFORM

In order to achieve a more just society, we must look at racial equity and the systems that cause extreme disparities from both preventative and restorative perspectives. Our work focuses on the Out of School Time Learning spaces and adult education and workforce development opportunities while taking a very specific look at the criminal justice realm. Our aim is to mitigate the long-term negative impacts for BIPOC communities and design new policy that helps Rhode Islanders return to a full life complete with inclusive and engaging prospects for home, work and life.

## We support:

- Out of School Time Learning mitigates the school to prison pipeline and for every \$1 spent on youth there is a \$3 return on investment according to the Afterschool Alliance. In this policy brief in 2020 it shows that Rhode Island spends \$263,750.00 on incarcerated youth per year. [\[POLICY BRIEF 2020\] Sticker Shock: The Cost of Youth Incarceration](#) – Justice Policy Institute. Let's stop investing in incarcerations and start investing in prevention.
- Cash Bail Reform – The U.S. jail population has grown dramatically in recent decades. This increase is due almost entirely to the rise of pretrial detention, the practice of holding a person in jail before trial even while they are presumed innocent. A single factor drives most pretrial detention, confining an estimated 2.5 million people each year behind bars: unaffordable cash bail.

Rhode Islanders incarcerated (per 100,000)

