



# UNITED WAY OF RHODE ISLAND 2024 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Including the 2024 Policy Agenda for  
The Alliance for Nonprofit Impact



## **OUR VISION**

**A Rhode Island where every individual in each community  
has equal opportunity for justice and prosperity.**

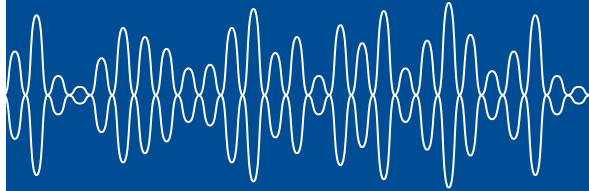
## **OUR MISSION**

**Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity  
and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders.**

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# UNITED WAY OF RHODE ISLAND 2024 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

## INTRODUCTION

United Way of Rhode Island is committed to creating positive and lasting change in our community through advocacy, collaboration, and policy change. Our legislative agenda is a reflection of our mission, strategic priorities, and the pressing needs of our community. Through a holistic approach, we aim to address critical issues and work towards a more equitable and thriving Rhode Island.

### Affordable Housing and Homelessness Prevention:

- Support legislation that increases the availability of affordable housing units, particularly for low-income families.
- Advocate for programs that prevent homelessness and provide supportive services for individuals and families in need.
- Promote policies that address the root causes of housing instability and prioritize equitable access to housing resources.

### Equitable Education and Opportunities:

- Advocate for increased funding for public schools, with a focus on schools serving underserved communities.
- Support policies that provide access to high-quality early childhood education and affordable childcare.
- Promote investment in out-of-school time learning programs and literacy initiatives to bridge educational gaps.
- Advocate for policies that create pathways for workforce development and job training, especially for marginalized communities.

### Economic Empowerment and Small Business Growth:

- Advocate for tax incentives and grants to promote the growth of minority-owned businesses.
- Support initiatives that provide technical assistance, mentorship, and access to capital for small businesses.
- Promote equitable procurement practices that prioritize minority-owned businesses in government contracts.
- Increase inclusion and investment in the nonprofit sector as a key strategy for sector growth.

### Racial and Socioeconomic Equity:

- Support policies that address systemic racism and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in all sectors.
- Advocate for criminal justice reform, including ending mass incarceration and promoting alternatives to incarceration.
- Promote policies that ensure fair wages, workers' rights, and access to affordable healthcare for all.



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## Civic Engagement and Advocacy Training:

- Advocate for increased civic education in schools to empower the next generation of informed citizens.
- Support initiatives that promote civic engagement, voter registration, and participation in the democratic process.
- Provide advocacy training and resources to individuals and organizations to amplify their voices for positive change.

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## Strategic Activities:

- Election 2024 – Increasing Voter Turnout by 25%; focus on BIPOC Communities
- 211 State Line Item – Increasing financial support for 211 operations by \$500,000

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The United Way of Rhode Island's legislative agenda represents our commitment to creating a more equitable, just, and prosperous future for all residents of our state. By advocating for policies that address critical issues, promote opportunity, and address disparities, we aim to make lasting and positive impact on the lives of individuals and families in Rhode Island.

## CONCLUSION

### Legislative Agenda: Affordable Housing and Homelessness Prevention

United Way of Rhode Island is committed to addressing the critical issues of affordable housing and homelessness in our state, in alignment with the Live United 2025 strategic plan. Our legislative agenda prioritizes policies and initiatives that aim to increase the availability of affordable housing, prevent homelessness, and address the root causes of housing instability. Key priorities include:

#### 1. Increasing Availability of Affordable Housing

**Units:** United Way of Rhode Island will actively support legislation that increases the availability of affordable housing units, particularly for low-income families. Access to safe, stable, and affordable housing is essential for individuals and families to thrive. We will work with policymakers to develop and advance policies that incentivize the construction and preservation of affordable housing, as well as the expansion of housing choice vouchers and rental assistance programs.

#### 2. Homelessness Prevention and Supportive

**Services:** We will advocate for programs that prevent homelessness and provide supportive services for individuals and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Homelessness prevention programs, emergency assistance, and case management services are critical to helping vulnerable populations maintain stable housing. United Way will collaborate with partners to ensure the availability of resources that offer a safety net for those in need.

#### 3. Addressing Root Causes of Housing Instability:

United Way recognizes the importance of addressing the root causes of housing instability. This includes advocating for policies that address economic disparities, access to affordable healthcare, mental health and addiction services, and education and workforce development opportunities. By addressing these systemic issues, we can work towards long-term solutions to prevent housing instability and homelessness.

#### 4. Equitable Access to Housing Resources:

We will promote policies that prioritize equitable access to housing resources, ensuring that historically marginalized communities have fair and equal opportunities to secure safe and affordable housing. United Way is committed to addressing housing disparities and will collaborate with organizations that focus on promoting fair housing practices and eliminating discrimination in housing.

Through grassroots advocacy, partnerships with housing advocates, and engagement with community

stakeholders, United Way of Rhode Island will actively pursue these key priorities to advance affordable housing and homelessness prevention in our state.

Together, we can create a Rhode Island where everyone has a place to call home and the opportunity to thrive.

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## Legislative Agenda: Economic Empowerment and Small Business Growth

United Way of Rhode Island is dedicated to advancing economic empowerment and supporting the growth of small businesses, particularly those owned by minorities. Our legislative agenda, in alignment with the Live United 2025 strategic plan, highlights key priorities aimed at creating economic opportunities and prosperity for all Rhode Islanders. These priorities include:

### 1. **Tax Incentives and Grants for Minority-Owned Businesses:**

United Way of Rhode Island will advocate for the establishment of tax incentives and grant programs to promote the growth and sustainability of minority-owned businesses. By providing financial support and incentives, we aim to foster entrepreneurship and reduce economic disparities within minority communities.

### 2. **Small Business Support and Access to Resources:**

We will actively support initiatives that offer technical assistance, mentorship, and increased access to capital for small businesses. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and by equipping them with the tools and resources needed to thrive, we can create a more resilient and inclusive economic landscape.

### 3 **Equitable Procurement Practices:**

United Way will work to promote equitable procurement practices within government contracts. This includes advocating for policies that prioritize

minority-owned businesses in public procurement processes. By ensuring fair access to government contracts, we can boost economic empowerment in underrepresented communities.

### 4. **Investment in the Nonprofit Sector:**

We recognize the vital role that the nonprofit sector plays in economic empowerment and community development. As such, we will advocate for increased inclusion and investment in the nonprofit sector. Strengthening the nonprofit sector will enable it to better serve the community, create jobs, and address critical social issues.

Through strategic partnerships, advocacy efforts, and collaboration with small business owners and community leaders, United Way of Rhode Island will actively pursue these key priorities to promote economic empowerment and small business growth. Together, we can build a more equitable and prosperous Rhode Island for all residents.

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## Legislative Agenda: Racial and Socioeconomic Equity

United Way of Rhode Island is committed to advancing racial and socioeconomic equity as a fundamental aspect of our Live United 2025 strategic plan. Our legislative agenda outlines key priorities aimed at addressing systemic racism, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, and creating a more just and equitable Rhode Island. Our priorities include:

### 1. **Addressing Systemic Racism and Promoting Equity and Inclusion:**

United Way of Rhode Island will actively support policies and initiatives that address systemic racism in all sectors, including education, healthcare, employment, and housing. We will advocate for measures that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, such as equitable hiring practices, anti-discrimination policies, and diversity training.

### 2. **Criminal Justice Reform:**

We will advocate for comprehensive criminal justice reform that seeks to end mass incarceration and promotes alternatives to incarceration. Our focus will be on policies that address the root causes of crime, support rehabilitation and reintegration, and reduce the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on marginalized communities.

### 3. **Fair Wages and Workers' Rights:**

United Way will work to ensure that all Rhode Islanders have



access to fair wages and workers' rights. This includes advocating for policies that establish a living wage, protect workers from exploitation and discrimination, and promote workplace diversity and inclusion.

4. **Access to Affordable Healthcare for All:** We will support policies that guarantee access to affordable healthcare for all residents, regardless of income or background. This includes advocating for measures to expand healthcare coverage,

reduce healthcare disparities, and improve the overall health and well-being of Rhode Islanders.

By actively engaging with policymakers, community leaders, and advocacy organizations, United Way of Rhode Island will work tirelessly to advance these key priorities and create a more equitable and inclusive state. We believe that by addressing these critical issues, we can build a Rhode Island where every resident has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their racial or socioeconomic background.

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## Legislative Agenda: Civic Engagement and Advocacy Training

United Way of Rhode Island is dedicated to fostering civic engagement and advocacy as a fundamental component of our Live United 2025 strategic plan. Our legislative agenda outlines key priorities aimed at empowering individuals and communities to actively participate in the democratic process and advocate for positive change. Our priorities include:

1. **Civic Education in Schools:** We will advocate for increased civic education in schools to empower the next generation of informed citizens. By incorporating civics and government education into the curriculum, we aim to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to be active and engaged members of their communities. This includes understanding the importance of voting, civic responsibilities, and the structure of government.
2. **Promoting Civic Engagement:** United Way of Rhode Island supports initiatives that promote civic engagement, voter registration, and participation in the democratic process. We will work to eliminate barriers to voting and ensure that all eligible residents have access to the ballot. This includes advocating for policies that expand access to early voting, vote-by-mail options, and polling locations.
3. **Advocacy Training and Resources:** We recognize the importance of advocacy as a means to effect positive change. We will provide advocacy training and resources to individuals and organizations, equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to amplify their voices in support of critical issues. This training will empower residents to engage with policymakers and advocate for policies that align with our Live United 2025 goals.
4. **Community Mobilization:** United Way will actively engage with community organizations, nonprofits, and advocacy groups to mobilize collective efforts for positive change. We will support initiatives that encourage community members to come together, share their perspectives, and advocate for equitable policies that address the root causes of community challenges.
5. **Supporting Civic Initiatives:** We will partner with organizations and initiatives that are dedicated to civic engagement and advocacy. This includes supporting initiatives that increase voter registration, drive voter turnout, and provide nonpartisan resources to inform voters about candidates and issues.

By championing these key priorities, United Way of Rhode Island aims to create a more engaged and informed citizenry, strengthen our democracy, and ensure that the voices of all residents are heard in the policymaking process. We believe that an active and participatory community is essential for achieving our Live United 2025 goals and building a more equitable and inclusive Rhode Island.

# 2024 POLICY AGENDA

The Nonprofit Resource Center mission has four core areas of policy focus, on both the federal and state levels:

- **Support Nonprofit Staff** – Build a resilient, skilled workforce through support of entry level career pathways and professional/leadership development pipelines; improve working conditions, wages and benefits; address issues of burnout and secondary trauma.
- **Strengthen Nonprofit Organizations** – Work to ensure that nonprofits have the necessary skills, resources, technical assistance, practical tools for operations, and capacity to advance their missions in a sustainable way.
- **Improve the Nonprofit Ecosystem** – Advance equitable, supportive policies and practices that ensure a positive and productive collaboration with government partners; work to dismantle inequitable practices and structural barriers that impede the ability of nonprofits, particularly nonprofits led by people of color, to accomplish their mission and grow and sustain their work; seek improvements in state/federal contracting to ensure full cost, timely payment and livable wages; educate state leaders and policymakers about the importance and impact of the nonprofit sector in Rhode Island, as well as the unique role that nonprofits play in providing essential services on behalf of the state; increase private and public investment into the sector; increase parity in access to resources between for-profit and nonprofit organizations; work to increase representation and voice of the nonprofit sector in the development of policy, regulations and programs that affect the constituents and work of nonprofits.
- **Racial Equity** – Address structural and regulatory issues that have historically impeded the ability of nonprofits led by people of color to access the resources necessary to grow their work and accomplish their missions; support Rhode Islanders from diverse backgrounds as they pursue careers and leadership positions in the nonprofit sector; evaluate the impact of different policies affecting the nonprofit sector for their potential positive and negative impact on organizations led by and serving people of color, as well as staff of color; encourage policymakers to use an equity framework in evaluating the impact of proposed legislation; support efforts to expand justice, equity, diversity and inclusion policy and education work.

## 2023-2024 PRIORITIES

### Support for Nonprofit Workers

**Workforce pipeline** – To address the exodus of an increasing number of skilled, experienced nonprofit staff from the sector due to burnout, retirement, and compensation, it is essential to invest in entry level career pathways, and leadership development pipelines.

**Compensation and benefits** – Nonprofit workers deserve wages that are commensurate with their skills

and experience. Altruism does not pay the bills, and these staff should not have to sacrifice being able to provide for their families, accessing healthcare or planning for retirement in order to do work that benefits our communities. Public Service Loan Forgiveness helps nonprofit organizations by allowing them to compete for critical staff and reducing turnover. The program makes it more affordable to work in the nonprofit sector by lessening the burden of student

loans. As a result, nonprofits are able to recruit a more diverse workforce that better reflects the communities that they serve. Also, increasing AmeriCorps stipends from poverty level wages to liveable wages would increase the number of recent graduates able to explore career opportunities in the nonprofit sector.

Childcare and public transportation – Nonprofit workers need to have safe, affordable childcare options and accessible public transportation in order to remain in the workforce.

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## Investments in Nonprofit Organizations

**Sustainability of essential services** – The state contracts out its direct service work to nonprofit organizations, and they are the most important part of the state’s “service infrastructure.” State contracts, however, do not fully fund the contracted services, nor do they provide for market level wages. The sustainability of the state’s essential direct services is dependent on full cost contracts that provide liveable wages, and a long-term investment in this “service infrastructure” through targeted investments in building nonprofit capacity – technology, training, facilities, access to capital, etc.

**Increase charitable giving** – Rhode Island historically has ranked among the lowest states in terms of individual charitable giving, and there is a significant need to increase the resources available to nonprofits in the Ocean State. This requires increased awareness of the importance and impact of the nonprofit sector, an expanded pool of staff with fundraising expertise, and practical fund development tools. It can also be encouraged through policies that encourage charitable giving, like the universal charitable deduction, increased limits for qualified charitable distributions from IRA’s, and incentives for shorter term payouts from donor advised funds.

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## Improvements in Nonprofit Ecosystem

**State and federal contracting** – When nonprofits are contracted by the state, the nonprofit partner should be paid the full cost of providing the service, along with an adequate indirect rate that takes into account the actual costs necessary for making that service available, like staffing, financial reporting, evaluation, facilities, insurance, etc. Reimbursement should be received in a timely fashion, with equitable accommodations or partial upfront payments for organizations with expertise and trusted relationships with key demographic groups to ensure that those organizations who cannot front the cost of the entire program or service are still able to provide services. Effort should be made to streamline the application, procurement and reporting processes whenever possible so that nonprofits can focus on their mission-related programs and services.

and difficulty for smaller nonprofits of accessing auditing. Indirect rates should be increased to cover the actual costs of providing essential public services. Nonprofits are also forced to navigate a confusing array of (sometimes contradictory) regulations and requirements based on the source of funding. Many nonprofits who are well-qualified to deliver essential services choose not to apply for government funding because of the bureaucratic hurdles. This means that community needs go unmet, and existing resources are further constrained.

**Favorable regulatory environment** – The RI nonprofit incorporation statute needs to be revised according to the proposed Bar Association template to address the current working environment, including the prevalence of hybrid board meetings, etc. The audit requirement should be increased because of the cost

**Representation in government** – Despite being the third largest employer of the private workforce in the nation and responsible for delivering almost six percent of its gross domestic product, the nonprofit sector has no representation within the state or federal government. This lack of representation and voice, especially when policies that impact nonprofits and the communities they serve are created, has consequences. When the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) was created in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was no one “at the table” to caution that administering PPP through the Small



Business Administration with an application form well-suited for business but not nonprofits could be problematic. Despite the overall success of PPP, many nonprofits were left out. In addition, nonprofits are experts in the issues facing our communities, but need greater clarity on how they can share their expertise and educate policymakers about needs on the frontlines, as well as the consequences of previous policy decisions on community members. Today, the rules around political activity are both extremely important (to keep nonprofits on the right side of the lobbying line) while also extremely complicated. That complexity has a chilling effect on many nonprofits who find it simply easier to refrain from policy education and advocacy than try and understand the rules, so their expertise is missing from the strategy development process, often leading to less effective government work down the road.

**Access to data** – Nonprofit data should be included in state and federal research products in the same way, and with the same timeliness, as for-profit data, so that community leaders and policymakers can

understand trends and make strategic decisions. Data on the impact of the nonprofit sector on the state's economy is necessary to ensure that nonprofits are included in statewide economic development and workforce development planning.

### **Parity between for-profit and “social profit”**

**organizations** – Nonprofits should be able to access resources on par with for-profit companies, including hiring incentives, access to small business supports, and access to capital. Similarly, the volunteer mileage reimbursement rate should be tied to the business mileage reimbursement rate. The nonprofit workforce represents more than ten percent of private sector employment, the nation's third largest. Despite its size, and despite paying billions in payroll taxes, nonprofit employers are ineligible for many tax credits for-profit employers use to diversify and strengthen their workforce. Policymakers need to expand eligibility for key tax incentives to include nonprofits, ensuring that employers of every type can invest in their workforce, making it healthier and more equitable.

## NOTES

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