



Rhode Island Public
Expenditure Council



United Way of Rhode Island

NEWS RELEASE

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United Way of Rhode Island and the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council release a study on Rhode Island's Social Safety Net
Study finds R.I.'s social safety net spending shifted markedly from program geared for low-income individuals to Medicaid

Providence, RI (Aug. 20, 2009) – The Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC) and United Way of Rhode Island (UWRI) announced today the release of a joint study that provides an in-depth look at the range of services that comprise R.I.'s Social Safety Net and the populations it serves. The study, the first of its kind in Rhode Island and entitled *Social Safety Net Study for Rhode Island: Data Analysis Summary and Conceptual Framework*, also examined enrollment and cost trends and offered information on comparisons to other N.E. states.

(The report can be accessed on both organizations' websites at www.ripec.org and www.LIVEUNITEDri.org.)

“All of us around the table agreed that the most desirable outcome of a social-service system is to help people be as independent as possible and support those who are unable to care for themselves,” said UWRI President and CEO Anthony Maione. “Our nation is in the midst of one of the biggest health-care debates in decades. And this study can be used to assist public policy makers to better serve Rhode Islanders more effectively and efficiently.”

“The findings in the report illustrate that we need to rethink what we are trying to accomplish with the Social Safety Net programs,” said RIPEC Executive Director John Simmons. “The current safety net programs have evolved over time and we need to set a common vision and purpose for what the Social Safety Net should accomplish.”

One of the major findings is that Social Safety Net programs have a significant impact on the State's budget. In the enacted FY 2010 budget, grants and benefits account for 46 percent of total spending in Rhode Island. While spending on these initiatives has always constituted a significant portion of the State's budget, the composition of this spending has broadened over time and shifted from mainly non-health services to health programs such as Medicaid.

The study calls for improved follow-through and continuous assistance such as stronger workforce development and stabilization maintenance. For those individuals receiving safety-net funds and who can become self-sustaining, there should be consistency - a continuum of services – so those emerging from great need are assisted through the entire process from finding and keeping employment to maintaining their self-sustainability.

In addition, social and health programs administered by State agencies to those in need are arduous and complex. They require applicants to fill out multiple applications. Several Rhode Island State offices oversee the same programs, and even within agencies there are potential redundancies.

The report recommends that an initial assessment of anyone in need should occur only once, and the case should be followed by that same entity from crisis or dire need to self-sustainability. The study proposes implementing a “holistic” approach, and a coordinated, streamlined effort among State agencies. Additional principles to improve the assistance provided to those in need include:

- Improved accountability associated with government spending is desirable.
- As participant income rises, government supports should be withdrawn gradually, to maintain the provision of basic needs.
- Consideration of the relative responsibility of individuals, families, nonprofit organizations and faith-based groups should be included in government’s planning for services.

The *Social Safety Net Study for Rhode Island* only examined federal and State-government-funded programs. However, it brought to light that nonprofit and faith-based organizations play a critical safety-net role to those in dire need. They are the first-responders, and, in many cases, the only assistance some receive.

About United Way of Rhode Island

United Way of Rhode Island has been working to improve the quality of life in Rhode Island communities for over 80 years. UWRI’s mission is to mobilize the caring power of the community to improve the lives of people in need and address the issues Rhode Islanders care most about. Our goal is to create long-lasting changes that prevent problems from happening in the first place. We believe that all Rhode Islanders deserve the opportunity to have a better life, as when any one of us succeeds, we all succeed. At United Way, we refer to this as advancing the common good. For more information, visit www.LIVEUNITEDri.org

About Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council

RIPEC is an independent, nonprofit and nonpartisan public policy research and education organization dedicated to the advancement of effective, efficient and equitable government in Rhode Island. To learn more visit RIPEC’s website at www.ripec.org