

Support for women, children dropping

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Published online April 6, 2010

PROVIDENCE – State support to help women and families attain or maintain economic self-sufficiency has severely eroded, according to a report released Tuesday by the Women’s Fund of Rhode Island and The Poverty Institute at a news conference at The Rhode Island Foundation.

The report, “An Uneven Path: State Investments in Women’s Economic Self-Sufficiency,” tracks the impact that years of decreased funding have had on four key programs: child care assistance, health care, cash assistance and child support. The report’s findings include:

- State investments in child care assistance have fallen by almost 90 percent during the last five years. As a result, after reaching peak enrollment of more than 13,000 children in 2003, program restrictions have resulted in fewer children being enrolled in 2010 (6,812) than when the program began in 1997 (7,159).
- State spending on cash assistance benefits has been so severely eroded that in Fiscal Year 2010, no state funds will be spent on benefits. A 2008 overhaul of the program that includes strict time limits has caused about one-third of families, or about 3,000, to lose their benefits during the economic downturn and have their access to education and training removed.
- While private health care costs have more than doubled over the last 10 years, spending cuts and programmatic changes in the RIte Care/RIte Share health insurance program have caused significant declines in enrollment in the past five years.
- The child support office has lost close to one-third of its staff during the last several years, resulting in very high caseloads per worker. Rhode Island lags considerably behind all other New England states and the nation when it comes to establishing child support orders.

At the news conference, logistics, participants and partner organizations for an upcoming gubernatorial candidates’ forum on women’s policy issues also will be announced.