

# RHODE ISLAND 2030

Charting a Course for the  
Future of the Ocean State

A Working Document

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# A LETTER FROM THE MCKEE-MATOS ADMINISTRATION

Dear Rhode Islanders:

As Rhode Island emerges from a once-in-a-century public health crisis, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a more resilient, prosperous, and equitable state for all. Making the most of this opportunity will require a collaborative effort to address not only the issues caused by the pandemic, but also those that existed long before.

That's why our Administration launched RI 2030: to craft a vision both for the state's economic recovery as well as for what we want Rhode Island to look like in the years ahead. As Governor and Lt. Governor, we are pleased to share this RI 2030 working document and preliminary recommendations that, once finalized, will help guide policy priorities, federal spending, strategic collaborations and legislative initiatives. While RI 2030 is not aimed solely at addressing the federal dollars coming into the state, a key goal of this initiative is to help Rhode Island leverage the State Fiscal Recovery Fund towards achieving the goals set through our RI 2030 process.

The RI 2030 process began with a series of virtual community conversations focused on key topics of interest for Rhode Islanders such as housing, tourism, small business, climate change, children and youth services, health, higher education, and more. These conversations included discussions with a panel of diverse Rhode Island community stakeholders, keynote speakers with national expertise on the topic, and members of the General Assembly. So far, our virtual community conversations have been viewed more than 15,000 times and garnered more than 500 comments from the public. From these discussions, and with input from all State agencies, we created the RI 2030 working document.

To build on this momentum, and with this document as a starting point, our Administration will be launching a series of in-person regional community conversations as part of a five-county listening tour. In partnership with the University of Rhode Island (URI) and its faculty, the URI Research Foundation, and faculty from other institutions around the state, the planning process will culminate in a 2030 visioning document that can be used to guide future investments.

We will present our RI 2030 vision thus far and continue to develop this document with your thoughts and feedback in mind. The document provided below is intended as an initial draft to guide the work to come, with a formal 2030 framework to emerge from this process over the next several months.

We look forward to working with all Rhode Islanders as we continue to build our vision for 2030 together.

Sincerely,



Daniel J. McKee  
Governor of Rhode Island



Sabina Matos  
Lt. Governor of Rhode Island

# RI 2030 PRIORITY: SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES

Rhode Island has been called the quintessential small business state. Small businesses in Rhode Island make up 98.9% of all businesses in the state and employ more than half (52.2%) of all workers (compared with 46.8% nationally). These firms range from small family-owned retail and restaurant businesses to larger professional services, construction, and advanced manufacturing businesses. Some of our small businesses started small and want to remain that way, while others have their sights set on rapid growth. Not only are small businesses a crucial part of Rhode Island's economy, but entrepreneurship represents an important opportunity for job creation, wealth building, and economic growth.

Small businesses face several challenges, from accessing capital to navigating regulatory requirements at the federal, state, and local levels, and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of these challenges while introducing new ones like reduced consumer confidence and workforce shortages. This is especially true for COVID-impacted industries such as Rhode Island's prized tourism and hospitality sector, as well as disproportionately impacted minority-owned businesses. Additionally, during the pandemic supply chains and business models were disrupted for many industries, including manufacturers, retailers, agricultural businesses, and others. Addressing these challenges are key to facilitating the full and broad-based recovery of Rhode Island's small business community.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

- While Rhode Island provided a range of small business supports throughout the COVID-19 crisis and is outperforming many neighboring states, small businesses and impacted industries such as retail, tourism, hospitality, and child care continue to face challenges as they emerge from the global pandemic.
- Disparities and barriers persist for small business owners in historically disadvantaged groups and marginalized communities.
- Small businesses confront multiple barriers that impede their long-term success—especially in areas like licensing, zoning, regulatory compliance, and access to capital.





## CURRENT STATE AGENCY INITIATIVES

Through the pandemic, the State has provided more than \$140 million in federal funds to assist more than 9,000 small businesses. This included multiple rounds of direct relief as well as more targeted rounds of assistance, including the \$3.6 million Business Adaptation program, the \$7.4 million Take It Outside program, and the \$15 million Hospitality Arts Tourism (HArT) program. The small business supports launched in response to the global pandemic built upon a range of existing agency initiatives, including the Innovation Voucher program, SupplyRI, and the John H. Chafee Center for International Business at Bryant University. Additionally, to address ongoing inequities in business ownership across the state, Commerce has partnered with the Rhode Island foundation to fund a \$150,000 minority-owned business landscape analysis and strategic planning report to lay the foundation for future initiatives to increase the number of minority-owned businesses in the state.

**RI 2030 SMALL BUSINESS GOAL:** By the next decade, Rhode Island will have a thriving, vibrant, and diverse small business ecosystem that has emerged stronger and more resilient from the global pandemic and is a key driver of opportunity, job creation, and economic growth for Rhode Island.

## SMALL BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

- Support a full and broad-based recovery for Rhode Island's small business community and COVID-impacted industries such as retail, tourism, hospitality, and many others.
- Expand the number of small businesses with access to the knowledge, technology, service providers, local vendors, procurement opportunities, and capital they need to operate and grow their businesses.
- Increase the dollar amount of federal and Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI) funding for small businesses as well as the number of CDFIs operating in Rhode Island.
- Increase the number, percent, and long-term success of minority-owned businesses in the state.
- Make Rhode Island the premier state in the region for the speed, predictability, and ease of starting or running a business while also increasing Rhode Island's competitiveness with peer states in terms of the cost of doing business.



## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

As it did with the rest of the country, the global pandemic hit small businesses in Rhode Island hard. Consumer confidence for activities like dining out at restaurants, going to movie theaters, and attending large in-person events declined considerably. Additionally, to mitigate the most severe effects of the global pandemic, Rhode Island implemented a series of temporary public health measures that impacted small business' operations. These and other factors resulted in revenue and employment declines and led many small businesses to change business models, create new revenue streams, and shift from in-person to online selling. The global pandemic had a disproportionate impact on small businesses and minority-owned businesses since many of these businesses operate without financial safety nets.

A range of federal and state programs—from the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program to the state's Restore RI grant program—delivered critical support to Rhode Island's small business community. Additionally, the state and many municipalities eased certain restrictions on businesses, such as temporarily relaxing business filing requirements, permitting additional outdoor dining capacity, and allowing carry out alcohol from restaurants. These and other interventions provided a key lifeline to businesses to survive the economic downturn. While certain segments of the small business community (e.g., manufacturing and construction) have experienced a strong recovery, others (e.g., tourism, hospitality, Main Street retailers, and others) have yet to fully recover. Supporting COVID-impacted industries and addressing the broader range of COVID-related challenges are essential to facilitate a full and broad-based recovery of Rhode Island's small business community.

Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, small businesses face several challenges. Hiring workers with the appropriate skillsets remains a major challenge. In July 2021, the U.S. had a record 10.9 million unfilled positions, and 51% of small business owners reported having open positions that cannot be filled (the highest rate on record). Small businesses, especially those owned by people of color, often face barriers and/or higher costs for financing as well. According to the Federal Reserve's 2021 Small Business Credit Survey, 53% of small businesses report that their credit needs are not met. CDFIs play an important role in expanding small business access to capital; however, Rhode Island lacks an established CDFI focused exclusively on the state. With fewer employees, small business owners and employees are often playing multiple parts in the business and lack access to specialized roles or service providers (e.g., legal and accounting). Many businesses struggle to navigate federal, state, and local regulations. The complexity surrounding matters like business formation, annual registration, tax filing, licensing, and regulatory compliance not only pose barriers to entrepreneurship and growth but can also increase the cost of doing business. Assisting businesses with these requirements and advancing policies that simplify and reduce regulatory burdens are important for improving the business climate, supporting entrepreneurship, and facilitating economic growth over the long-term.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC (CONT.)

As with the rest of the U.S., there are ongoing inequities in small business ownership in Rhode Island. Whereas Black/African American people comprise 6.8% of the Rhode Island population, they only represent 3.7% of business ownership. Similarly, Hispanic/Latino people make up 16.9% of the population, but they represent a mere 3.7% of business ownership. Women make up 51.2% of the population but represent only 40.5% of business ownership. Addressing these disparities is critical for advancing a more inclusive and equitable economy, creating meaningful opportunities for wealth building, and catalyzing entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic growth.

### RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- Provide support for small businesses and COVID-impacted industries like tourism and hospitality to upgrade HVAC systems, increase outdoor capacity, and make other pandemic-related adaptations with an eye towards boosting consumer confidence, catalyzing additional economic activity, and increasing resiliency.
- Evaluate rule and regulation changes instituted during the pandemic (e.g., outdoor dining expansion, liquor-to-go) that can be continued to benefit both businesses and consumers.
- Increase and enhance marketing efforts to bring tourism and business travel back to the state as the pandemic comes to an end.
- Fund new and support the expansion of existing direct and technical assistance programming for small businesses. This should include: (1) direct business assistance; (2) back office services and supports that can be offered to clusters or categories of businesses, (3) educational resources to support businesses with activities like applying for grant programs and developing marketing plans; and (4) programming to encourage small businesses to improve operations and increase productivity through investments in technology.

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"As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospitality industry will have several needs. However, in the short term, we've identified the top three. That would be: workforce development using Real Jobs spending; funding for inside HVAC systems for clean air; and assisting us with expanded outdoor dining, particularly as we work with the cities and towns, and also to step it up a little bit and make the outdoors much more convenient, much more friendly, and much more comfortable for our consumer." - **Dale Venturini, President & CEO, RI Hospitality Association / Community Conversation Participant**

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## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- Expand access to capital by (1) leveraging federal funding to create capital/funding programs for small businesses—particularly small businesses with strong growth potential and those pivoting in response to the global pandemic; (2) strengthening and growing capital programs—supported through public and private funding—for historically underserved and marginalized business owners; and (3) establishing or attracting CDFIs focused on providing financing to small businesses in Rhode Island—especially businesses that are often excluded from traditional funding sources.
- Expand successful workforce development programs (such as Real Jobs RI and Back to Work RI) and continue the partnerships that have been developed between educational institutions and small businesses in order to address ongoing workforce shortage and skills gap challenges.
- Explore models such as health insurance cooperatives and other collective services to help streamline the process, increase the buying power, and increase affordability for small businesses to provide employee benefits and secure other services.
- Eliminate paper forms for business licensing permits and more at both the state and municipal level, replacing them with digital, and where possible, integrated versions.
- Draw upon this digital integration to create a gateway or coordinated approach to government support for small businesses.
- Help retiring small business owners keep ownership of the firm local and encourage employee ownership (ESOP) takeovers where possible.
- Continue to ease licensing and permitting requirements and reduce costs to encourage additional small business formation and otherwise improve the business climate.
- Increase and simplify access to federal, state, and local procurement contracts for small businesses.
- Create a Taxpayer Advocate to help small businesses navigate tax administrative processes.

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“I have been the only female, the only Black person, or the only immigrant in many different scenarios, and I think that there needs to be a connection for entrepreneurs, or mentorship for people who look like me from people who look like me, so I think that’s another really big gap that I have noticed throughout my time.” - **Saron Mechale, goTeff, Inc. / Community Conversation Participant**

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# RI 2030 PRIORITY: INVESTING IN OUR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EARLY EDUCATION

Healthy children and families are the foundation of a resilient and productive state. Strengthening early childhood education, health care and behavioral health care, improving child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and reducing child poverty are vital to Rhode Island's success. Investments in children and families not only support our state today, but also ensure the future strength of Rhode Island's economy. Despite the importance of supporting children, we know that families struggle to afford and access early education and health services, the care workforce that provides those services is not adequately compensated, and children have inequitable experiences due to historic and systemic racism. It is vital that Rhode Island prioritize the health, well-being, and positive development of our children in every decision as we look towards the future to ensure that Rhode Island is a place where every family would want to raise their child.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

- To ensure children are successful in school and beyond, children and their families must have access to holistic, community-embedded supports, including health, behavioral health, and high-quality early education. This requires additional investment and partnership among government, communities, and providers.
- Inequitable access to high-quality services continues to drive disparities in our state, particularly for children in low-income, immigrant, and/or households of color and for children with special needs.
- Progress for children cannot happen without ensuring that the people who care for and create opportunities for kids—i.e., families, educators, and service providers—are meaningfully engaged and supported.



## CURRENT STATE AGENCY INITIATIVES

Rhode Island has implemented several key initiatives to support children and families, with a focus on addressing opportunity gaps existing among the youngest children and supporting working families to access supports and services. During the pandemic, Rhode Island took action to address gaps in care for children, including focused actions to increase routine vaccination rates and well-child visits. Even prior to the pandemic, there had been growing concern about behavioral health supports for children; the State is in the process of collaborating with internal and external stakeholders to develop a comprehensive system of care plan for children's behavioral health. Within child welfare and juvenile justice, the State has focused on prevention and getting back to basics with strong results.

**RI 2030 CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND EARLY EDUCATION GOAL:** By the next decade, Rhode Island will have a comprehensive, culturally responsive system of services and supports that ensures each and every child has the opportunity to thrive in a system that eradicates disparities.

## CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND EARLY EDUCATION OBJECTIVES

- Reduce and eliminate disparities by race and ethnicity in child poverty, early educational opportunities, health care outcomes, and behavioral health care outcomes by using a race equity lens in all policy development and by developing policy in collaboration with the community.
- Work towards ensuring all children, starting in infancy, have access to high-quality affordable child care in which no family in the state must spend more than 7% of income to access high-quality childcare (the federal standard of childcare affordability).
- Implement universal, high-quality Pre-K for children ages 3 and 4 through a mixed delivery system.
- Ensure that children enter Kindergarten ready to learn and are on a path to reading proficiently in third grade.
- Implement universal access to health insurance for children, regardless of immigration status, and ensure families can access health resources equitably.

## CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND EARLY EDUCATION OBJECTIVES (CONT.)

- Ensure that all children experiencing behavioral health challenges have access to a comprehensive system of care.
- Ensure that the child welfare system is meeting the needs of children and families by having the response, placement, goals, and timing required to best support children, and address child welfare with an equity lens.
- Ensure that families experiencing poverty have access to the resources they need to support themselves and their children to lead healthy lives, including food, housing, education, and job training.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic forced many parents out of the labor force because they had to take care of their children. The labor force participation rate fell from 64.2% in 2019 to 63.4% in 2020, and participation in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), the State's program to subsidize child care costs for lower-income families, fell by as much as 40% during the pandemic, leaving child care providers with low enrollment and thus lower revenues causing them to close classrooms. However, as families look to re-enter the workforce, the early learning system – including Head Start, Pre-K, infant/toddler care, center-based, and Family Child Care – is struggling to find qualified educators to keep existing classrooms open and also to open new rooms due to the persistent low wages within the field. This is a pay equity concern, as the majority of early childhood education staff are women, and many are women of color.

Even before the pandemic, the child care system was not meeting the needs of families. In Rhode Island, the average annual cost of child care for an infant is approximately \$13,000. Based on the federal child care affordability guidelines that families should spend no more than 7% of their income on child care, Rhode Islanders would need to earn over \$180,000 a year on average for infant care to be considered affordable. According to the U.S. Treasury Department, the child care system represents a market failure, in which workers are paid low wages but the service is still unaffordable for many families. While CCAP is designed to help lower-income families afford child care, the current rates do not cover the true cost of high-quality care. Programs like Head Start and Rhode Island Pre-K are vital to supporting access to quality early childhood education for low-income families, but there is limited capacity available.



## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC (CONT.)

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The pandemic also impacted children's overall engagement in services and supports that are vital to healthy physical and behavioral development. While Rhode Island leads the nation for rates of children's health insurance coverage (with 98.1% of children covered, ranking #2 in the nation), our system does not ensure that every child can equitably access care; in particular, children who are undocumented do not have access to health insurance. As families sheltered in place, the systems that typically identify and support families were unable to reach families. Due to the pandemic, there was approximately a 45% decrease in Child Outreach screening to identify children for Early Childhood Special Education and a 15.3% decline in referrals to Early Intervention. As a result, many children who would benefit from services have not received them during a crucial part of their development. During the pandemic, Rhode Island has accumulated more than 70,000 "lost doses" of routine childhood vaccines and is still missing over 5,000 lead screenings. In addition, the national journal "Pediatrics" reported that 14% of parents are reporting worsening behavioral health issues due to the pandemic from their children, and the state has seen an increase in child and adolescent uses of psychiatric emergency departments. Racial disparities exist across all health measures, and there are significant racial disparities in addressing children's behavioral health, as children of color are more likely to be criminalized, less likely to be identified for supports, and less likely to have supports that are culturally competent.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC (CONT.)

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on child welfare and juvenile justice operations. Though the State continues to see a lower level of reports to the child abuse and neglect hotline, it is unclear how the start of the 2021-22 school year will affect this trend. As with other child service providers, community providers have also been hit hard by the pandemic and are experiencing severe difficulties in adequately staffing their programs due to reimbursement rates that have not kept pace with the cost of living. Despite the impacts of the pandemic, in the last two years, the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) has made significant strides in keeping children safe at home with their family and out of the juvenile justice system. Compared to September 2019, there are now 192 fewer children involved in the child welfare system (6% decrease), 131 fewer children in out-of-home care (7% decrease), 61 fewer children in congregate care settings (16% decrease), 100 fewer youth being overseen by Juvenile Probation (35% decrease), and 12 fewer children at the Training School (26% decrease).

Historic and ongoing systemic exclusion of people of color from economic opportunity has led families of color in Rhode Island to be trapped in the cycle of poverty at higher rates than White families. Between 2015 and 2019, 55% of Native American, 33% of Hispanic, and 27% of Black children in Rhode Island lived in poverty, compared to 12% of Asian children and 13% of White children. The experience of living in poverty can have adverse impacts on a child's growth and development. While pandemic programs such as the Child Tax Credit have temporarily helped to reduce child poverty, longer-term systemic changes must be implemented to eliminate child poverty and support families in achieving economic self-sufficiency.

## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- Ensure that there is enough capacity in child care across the mixed delivery system to serve families as they return to work through investing in temporary wage enhancements for the child care workforce and supporting a pipeline of new family child care providers.
- Invest in increased Child Care Assistance Program rates for child care providers so low-income families can access high-quality child care and return to work.
- Deliver community services tailored to meet the needs of children disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.
- Invest in preventative health and behavioral health initiatives to ensure children are on track for child and adolescent well visits, vaccinations, lead screenings, and behavioral health screenings to address the impacts of the pandemic on early health and avoid expensive healthcare costs in coming years.
- Ensure that providers of key children's services – such as Early Intervention, pediatricians, and child welfare supports – are able to recover from the pandemic, hire and retain staff, and address the need for services without creating waiting lists or restricting access. This requires that the rates paid to providers are sufficient to ensure quality and access for all children, as well as ensure fair compensation for the workforce.
- Divert families from entering the “front door” of DCYF by investing in community-based prevention supports and meet the goal of licensing 250 new foster families.
- Strengthen family-friendly workplace policies such as paid sick leave and economic support for families.

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"I really feel like [at] the state and [federal level] we need to invest in early childhood education in order to make sure we can attract and retain qualified educators during those critical years where the relationship between a child and their teacher is so important. You know, it's building that foundation of security and that foundation so that they can be successful when they enter school. I believe these early years, it's not really an achievement gap, it's an opportunity gap. And especially our youngest children in Rhode Island, about 45% of them are children of color. We really could benefit from investing in quality family-based child care and center-based child care." - **Khadija Lewis-Khan, Executive Director, Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center / Community Conversation Participant**

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## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- Increase public investment in early childhood education – with a focus on increased Child Care Assistance Program rates that cover the true cost of quality care – to ensure that families can find high-quality, affordable care and that providers can make needed investments in quality and staff compensation with a dedicated funding source.
- Expand eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program to ensure that all families making at least state median salary have access to financial supports for child care, putting Rhode Island on a path to ensuring no family pays more than 7% of their income to access high quality child care.
- Provide wage incentives and free or reduced-price educational opportunities for early childhood educators to increase their certifications.
- Expand Rhode Island’s nationally top-ranked Pre-K program to all three and four years olds through a mixed delivery system that strengthens the entire birth through age 5 system, inclusive of Head Start, Family Child Care, and center-based care.
- Increase coordination and alignment between the early learning system and the K-12 school system in each community to ensure all children are on a path to academic success.
- Expand and enhance health insurance to cover all children and invest in innovative, community-based, integrated health models that address social determinants of health.
- Build the Family Home Visiting First Connections program to be universally accessible and increase capacity for long-term evidence-based Family Home Visiting programs.
- Implement a comprehensive children’s behavioral health system of care.
- Shift child welfare and juvenile justice systems to be more prevention-focused, beginning with implementation of the five-year Family First Prevention Services Act plan and achieving national human services accreditation from the Council Accreditation.
- Expand in-state psychiatric and high-end residential care to meet the needs of children and adolescents.
- Decrease child poverty by implementing enhanced RI Works supports and coordinating state policies and programs for job training, adult education, housing, food access, and more to support families to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

# RI 2030 PRIORITY: STRENGTHENING K-12 EDUCATION

Primary and secondary education are essential for both individual and community success. High-quality learning experiences help ensure students of all backgrounds are prepared to lead fulfilling, productive lives. Learning can occur inside and outside of the traditional classroom setting, as local communities must also be invested and involved in ensuring the educational success for youth; school systems, municipalities, community-based organizations, and parent organizations should intentionally partner and collaborate to meet the needs of ALL students.

In the 21st century economy, a high school diploma is no longer the guaranteed ticket to success it once was as more and more jobs require a post-secondary degree or other credential. Rhode Island's K-12 education system must focus on creating college, career and technical education pathways. Each of our 39 cities and towns is preparing students for these continuing education and training opportunities and for success in college, careers, and life.

Educators across Rhode Island demonstrate a deep commitment to providing excellent instruction for students. However, as is the case in much of the country, students in our state face inequitable access to high-quality educational opportunities. There are varying factors, but some of these disparities result from local control and funding of education. While education is a service provided by local cities and towns in Rhode Island, state government plays a critical role in ensuring access to equitable opportunities by equalizing funding, making sure local school districts comply with state and federal guidelines, and providing support to local districts as needed.

As our state emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, a national public health and economic crisis that laid bare root inequities in education, we have a tremendous opportunity to rebuild a high-quality public education system that provides all Rhode Islanders with equitable access to a world-class primary and secondary education.



## WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

- As more careers today and in the future require a post-secondary degree or credential, we need to ensure that our high school graduates are well prepared for the next steps they choose in their education.
- The pandemic highlighted the digital divide that still exists for our K-12 students in which some students and districts were able to transition much more easily to virtual learning than others.
- Education inequities by race, language, socioeconomic status, ability, or other identities continue to be a dominant force holding back both individual Rhode Islanders and our state.
- We need to build on the strong Career and Technical pathways we have created so Rhode Island students can access high paying jobs in the trades and 21st Century green economy jobs.

## CURRENT STATE AGENCY INITIATIVES

Rhode Island has set high standards for students, educators, and schools, and is committed to providing holistic support to meet these goals. To ensure all Rhode Island students are prepared for success in college, careers, and life, the State is taking steps to ensure that students have equitable access to high-quality curriculum materials aligned to rigorous college- and career-ready standards, and that educators have the professional learning opportunities and supports they need to implement research-based, culturally responsive, and equitable pedagogical approaches that address the needs of the whole child.

**RI 2030 K-12 EDUCATION GOAL:** By the next decade, Rhode Island will have a public education system that provides all Rhode islanders, regardless of their race, ethnicity, language, or geography, with equitable access to a high-quality primary and secondary education, which supports student learning and the development of the whole child and prepares students for post-secondary training and education.

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"Student-centered learning: creating individualized learning plans for our students and making sure that they're setting their own goals and that they're making sure that they are getting their education tailored to them, because students are the experts in their own education, and that's a really important thing that we seem to forget a lot, is the fact that our students know what we need, and we know what we need in order to succeed as well... And then also looking at a culturally relevant curriculum, and making sure that we are teaching our students about African-American history and about the history of women." - **Jaychele Nicole, Gen Z: We Want to Live / Community Conversation Participant**

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## K-12 EDUCATION OBJECTIVES

Education systems have a responsibility to identify and dismantle the root causes of educational inequity so that all students, regardless of race, language, socioeconomic status, ability, or other identities, have access to equitable opportunities.

- Ensure that all students, regardless of race, language, socioeconomic status, ability, or other identities, achieve at least one year's worth of learning every year.
- Increase the 4-year graduation rate and decrease the level of chronic absence among students.
- Significantly increase proficiency in reading, math, and science.
- Enhance engagement and collaboration between families, community members, school administrators, teachers, and students to improve student-centered policies and decisions.
- Promote professional development opportunities for educators.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Rhode Island educators, school staff, and families have gone to tremendous lengths to support student learning while prioritizing the health and safety of school communities. Rhode Island led the way in returning to the classroom reopening schools in September 2020, and then returning to full in-person learning in the 2020-21 school year.

Despite these efforts, students' academic growth continues to be impacted by the learning disruption created by the pandemic. The consequences have been greatest on those students already facing systemic educational disparities that the pandemic has magnified and exacerbated: namely, students from low-income communities, students of color, differently-abled students, and multilingual learners. The Rhode Island Department of Education quickly worked to identify the impact of the pandemic on students and develop strategies to accelerate learning and help students get up to speed through the convening of the Learning, Equity & Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) Task Force, which released its report and recommendations in April. These inequities continue to have profound impacts on students' lives. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Rhode Island has the lowest four-year high school graduation rate in New England at 84%, two points below the national average of 86%. While Black students in Rhode Island are somewhat less likely to graduate than their white counterparts, the big difference is between white students and Hispanic students (88% vs. 76%).

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC (CONT.)

The pandemic has magnified numerous longstanding systemic inequities impacting Rhode Island students, some of which relate to the local control and funding of public schools. There exists a vicious cycle in which higher-income residents leave a struggling school district, further reducing the resources available to the students in that district. In Rhode Island this often leads to lower-income districts that struggle to meet their students' needs while higher-income districts face many fewer challenges. In light of the ways that COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequities, Rhode Island has an unprecedented opportunity and responsibility to address the roots of systemic inequity in the state and build a system that guarantees all students' equitable access to high-quality, culturally responsive instruction that prepares them for success in college, careers, and life.

### RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- Energize our school communities— students and educators— by launching a back-to-school campaign and statewide toolkit, with attention to students who are chronically absent.
- Ensure all students have access to high-quality and personalized support from adults, both during the school day and through extended learning, partnerships for before/after school, and summer learning opportunities.
- Universally screen all students academically and social-emotionally and align resources to need.
- Improve and support student transitions, across grades and systems.
- Close the digital divide.
- Provide funds for schools to update physical buildings with better HVAC equipment to reduce the potential spread of disease.
- Work to turn around the Providence Public Schools and transition the district back to local control after goals of the Turnaround Action Plan, which was crafted with significant input from the community, have been met.
- Reform the policy and legislative foundations of statewide transportation and foster the associated conversation regarding regional cooperation.



## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- Provide additional resources to support lower-income districts in addressing the causes of educational inequities based on race, language, socioeconomic status, ability, or other identities.
- Strengthen the instruction of core subjects (English and Language Arts, mathematics, and science) by providing local school districts with high-quality instructional materials, focusing particularly on multilingual learners and others who need additional support and providing professional learning for educators to support curriculum implementation.
- Increase collaboration between traditional school systems and local communities, including leveraging community partners, to provide additional instruction, enrichment, extended learning opportunities, and summer learning programs.
- Work with Rhode Island's colleges and universities to ensure all high school graduates are prepared for the next step in their education.
- Continue to build Career and Technical Education programs designed to provide students with the academic and experiential skills to be equipped to succeed in a range of high-wage, high-skill and high demand careers.
- Reimagine the high school experience by revising graduation requirements to align with college and career readiness standards so students graduate ready for college and prepared to work.

# RI 2030 PRIORITY: ENHANCING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Workers with a college degree earn a higher income and are less likely to be unemployed than those without a degree. As an increasing number of jobs require a college degree or another postsecondary credential, it will become increasingly important that the State works with all levels of its educational and training institutions to help all Rhode Islanders receive the education and workforce development that will benefit them most. This includes removing barriers to education and working with graduates to ease post-graduation burdens, such as student loans and job opportunities.

Well-designed workforce development programs help both workers and employers by providing workers with in-demand skills and training necessary for an ever-changing economy. The State plays a critical role in coordinating these training programs to match the skills needed by Rhode Island employers with the workers looking for better pay and better career opportunities. Workforce development can play a crucial part in the state's regional economic development strategy by providing training to employees and workers to firms in potential growth clusters.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

- Although Rhode Island has expanded access to training and postsecondary education, significant growth must occur to ensure most Rhode Islanders are on a path to a postsecondary credential of value to their careers (whether a college degree, trade union certificate, or professional license)—especially for underrepresented segments of the population.
- Continued investment in innovation (e.g., research, entrepreneurship, tech transfer) is a key driver of broad-based economic growth and prosperity.
- Rhode Island needs to address the many challenges (e.g., disenrollment, child care access) and opportunities (e.g., hybrid learning, increased institutional collaboration, credentialing) stemming from the global pandemic.



## CURRENT STATE AGENCY INITIATIVES

As one of Rhode Island's premiere workforce development initiatives, Real Jobs RI provides targeted education and skills training for workers with the aim of ensuring employers have access to employees with the necessary skills to compete and grow, as well as to support Rhode Island workers who were displaced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Back to Work RI has facilitated the training, support, and hiring of thousands of workers to-date.

In the area of education, PrepareRI is an interagency initiative that supports college readiness, overall credential attainment and Career and Technical Education (CTE) to help students earn an industry credential and prepare them to enter the workforce that will lead to a range of high-wage, high-skill, and high-demand careers. Rhode Island Promise provides free tuition for recent high school graduates at the Community College of Rhode Island for up to 2 years which has been proven to increase the degree rate in the State.

**RI 2030 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION GOAL:** By the next decade, Rhode Island will have a dynamic and integrated workforce development and postsecondary education system that provides opportunity to all Rhode Islanders, drives job creation, economic growth, and innovation over the long-term.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OBJECTIVES

- Increase the percent of Rhode Islanders with a bachelor's and/or graduate degrees to the level of its southern New England neighbors and increase the percent of Rhode Islanders with a postsecondary credential to 70% by 2025.
- Create a longitudinal data system across K-12 education, higher education, and workforce data to better identify and meet the needs of Rhode Island workers and employers.
- Continue to invest in and develop the Higher Ed Academy. The State has set up this robust system that allows for multiple high-quality pathways for all learners, including supporting students transitioning from K-12 and pathways that support adults.
- Prepare Rhode Island's workers for careers in emerging growth sectors. Establish an Unemployment Insurance interface system that allows users more access to their information, prompt service, and access to additional tools such as job postings, career coaching, and career-readiness assistance.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OBJECTIVES (CONT.)

- Bolster Rhode Island's Office of Apprenticeship (DLT). "Registered Apprenticeship is a proven model of job preparation that combines paid on-the-job learning with related instruction to progressively increase workers' skill levels and wages." Because the higher education route is not for everyone, Rhode Island must work to expand access to the skilled work and, further, increase trade programming, particularly with the federal Infrastructure Package. This includes expanding work in the more traditional trades, like construction and steel work, but also investing heavily in Green Economy trades like wind and solar. All of Rhode Island's municipalities, from landlocked, rural Foster to the small island of New Shoreham, will benefit from investing in skilled trades.
- Make the labor market more equitable. Increasing wages in various underpaid fields is long overdue. In 2021, Governor McKee signed the Fight for 15 into law. However, child care workers, nursing home staff, and tipped workers are severely underpaid. There must be a target focus on these workforce fields, specifically in lieu of the recent trend of workers leaving their jobs (now known as "The Great Resignation").
- Invest in all 39 cities and towns. All of Rhode Island's municipalities will benefit from investing in workforce and postsecondary education as it will increase the per capita income in each community. From farms to fisheries each community has unique industries to build upon.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on employment here in Rhode Island and across the country. In April 2020, at the height of the pandemic-related business closures, Rhode Island's unemployment rate hit 17.4%. Substantial progress has been made with the State's unemployment rate decreasing to 5.8% by August 2021. People who had degrees fared better throughout the pandemic. According to the study, America's Divided Recovery, conducted by Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, data shows that more than 95% of jobs created out of the 2008 Recession went to those with more than a high school education. Those with 4- year degrees earn more than their non-degree counterparts. Increasing 2- to 4- year degree production and wrap around supports is necessary to ensure that Rhode Island's workforce is accessible, competitive, and equitable. Aligning education with workforce is essential to both employees and employers.

Workforce development is a collaborative process between education (K-12 and postsecondary), business, labor, and government with the goal of increasing a worker's skills and pay. The challenge of such programs is in matching the skills provided by workers with those needed by employers to ensure that both worker and employer benefit; this can be difficult in a changing and developing economy. Workforce development programs can work with regional economic development plans to train workers for jobs in identified growth clusters.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

Rhode Island has taken a strong lead in workforce development through programs such as Real Jobs RI, working with colleges, universities, and partner employers. This helps to ensure that workers attain the skills and competencies that will increase their pay and employability while also placing these workers in permanent employment. While these programs have been successful, there is still work to do, particularly around helping workers who have historically been disadvantaged in the labor market, including women, people of color, immigrants, and the formerly incarcerated. Women and people of color were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic; the State has made significant strides in addressing inequity through its workforce development programs and legislation, including the Fair Pay Act and the Fight for 15. In order to address these ongoing disparities, the State will need to address barriers such as child care, transportation, and technology assistance to provide equal and accessible opportunities.

Meaningful criminal justice reform is critical. We know that righting past injustices and creating new opportunities for Rhode Islanders is some of the most important work of the state. This means building career pathways to high-paying, in-demand jobs and providing educational opportunities, not only in our schools, but in our cities and towns and behind prison walls. This means investing in the physical and mental health of Rhode Islanders to foster the kind of strong, flourishing communities we want to see in RI 2030. But this also means tearing down barriers – to healthcare access, jobs, education, and housing.

Currently, Rhode Island lags behind most of its New England neighbors in percent of the population with a bachelor's or graduate degree, which leads to lower incomes and higher unemployment rates. While only 52.3% of working-aged Rhode Islanders had some form of post-secondary credential in September 2021, it is estimated that 72% of jobs in the state will require postsecondary education by 2030. During COVID-19, institutions realized that much could be done online so they improved their online offerings by offering digital or hybrid programming. However, to meet the needs for an educated and trained workforce, the state will have to better align postsecondary credentials with the demands of the labor market while also ensuring that the programs that provide these credentials are accessible, affordable, and scaled.

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"When you're able to offer livable wages to a training program, people want to be a part of it. They want to keep growing, they want to keep learning, they want to learn and thrive. But we also have to make it attractive for them to be able to do so ...[and] you need dollars and resources for that."

**- Nina Pande, SkillsRI / Community Conversation Participant**

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## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- Continue investing in and expanding workforce development initiatives like Real Jobs RI and Back to Work RI.
- Provide increased financial support to Rhode Island post-secondary students who saw their education disrupted or delayed because of the pandemic. Additionally, work to assist those who have not completed their education, for whatever reason, to complete their degree program, so that Rhode Island has a more educated, more competitive workforce. This will allow Rhode Islanders to make more money and garner more opportunities. This specifically will help close equity gaps in higher education.
- Continue to support and promote flexibility in options for education and training, including online and hybrid models, to ensure programming is accessible to students and trainees who may need to work or have other commitments while in a program. The pandemic has demonstrated that flexibility is important in all programming as it increases access to opportunities for all. It is important to note, however, that while there is an important place for online/hybrid models, it does not work in every scenario; continued flexibility for in-person/traditional models is also key.
- Expand sector-based workforce development programming across additional industries to create a wider array of options for workers. This includes creating “earn-and-learn” and apprenticeship-style career pathways in a variety of industries and sectors. Traditional degree-conferring education tracks are expensive, lengthy, and time-consuming. For many Rhode Islanders, these barriers put this approach out of reach. Creating a pipeline to career that allows individuals to learn on the job while earning wages, developing skills and experience, will not only position those individuals to work a good, sturdy job, but will also fill employer needs rapidly while creating a workforce with portable, applicable skills.
- Expand targeted support for adults (18+) to enroll and succeed in high-quality postsecondary options by establishing a Higher Ed Academy. This would be a 4–8-week program with navigation support, wrap-around services, advising, and college readiness with the intent to enroll adults in postsecondary education opportunities that end in credentials of value. It would expand existing programming to provide support for adult learners by navigating government programs and options needed for many Rhode Islanders to be able to continue their education.
- Develop explicit equity initiative(s) to address the socio-economic and race gaps across the enrollment, retention, and completion of postsecondary credentials spectrum.
- Support college readiness programming through increased investment in early college opportunities (e.g., dual and concurrent courses, AP and youth apprenticeships), counseling, and advising supports.

## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (CONT.)

- Better align the system of re-skilling and up-skilling, including with the Adult Ed program, programming overseen by the Department of Labor & Training, and alignment with our postsecondary institutions.
- Codify proven workforce and education models into law to ensure the continuity of beneficial programs.
- Expand the RI Reconnect program. To date, this program has supported people with advising to enter postsecondary programs and provided support services to individuals in the Back to Work Program. Expansion will ensure that adults who qualify and need the additional wraparound supports get this support (e.g., child care, housing, transportation).
- Invest in graduates. The state is facing serious issues with employee recruitment and retention, particularly in the STEM field. Reducing the barriers to workforce, regardless of the field, will benefit all. The creation of programs to give a student loan stipend for employees, assisting in cost of various forms of education and requirements for targeted populations, will benefit the workforce and overall economy.

## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- Expand Real Jobs RI and commit that most training investments go towards jobs in in-demand sectors and at least half goes to targeted industry clusters, specifically the Blue Economy and biosciences.
- Commit funding for training and employment for formerly incarcerated Rhode Islanders through Real Jobs RI.
- Establish a coordinated approach between Rhode Island's higher education facilities and targeted industry clusters, creating a network of innovation campuses.
- Create a comprehensive career pathway approach that aligns Rhode Island's workforce and postsecondary system to ensure that the wide range of workforce training and credential programs across the state's colleges and universities is demand-driven and coordinated to meet the needs of employers and Rhode Islanders.
- Expand small and medium business resource hubs across the state for talent and business services. Rhode Island's economy is small business-based, so this is essential to aid the state in employee retention and recruitment.

## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS (CONT.)

- Focus intentionally on student supports and outcomes across postsecondary education that focus on mental health services and civics education. Pre-pandemic, mental health and civics made headlines as some of the top areas of focus needed in schools. COVID-19 has exacerbated all issues, but it has highlighted the need for mental health supports and civic engagement in particular. Students want to be able to learn and participate in their home state, and Rhode Island can better prepare its future adult population by supporting these areas.
- Perform extensive research on Rhode Island's economy to understand areas of potential growth and need, allowing the State to focus on key areas to advance its economy. Rhode Island can harness its unique natural tools to compete with a changing global economy.
- Refine the State's capacity to identify employees in industries that are at risk from forces such as automation. Develop a targeted approach to providing them with 360-degree career and supportive services to prepare them to enter a new line of work and flourish in a changing economy.

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"Sometimes meeting a person where they are is about providing them with something that can get them started and make them incrementally more competitive. You can look at certificate programs in software development, in data analytics, in some of these emergent fields...We not only need to create and innovate—we need to operate. Once all those innovations come to the fore, they require an enormous number of people to develop the knowledge and skills and ability to make those entities happen." - **Sara Enright, Chief Outcomes Officer and VP for Student Services, Community College of Rhode Island**

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# RI 2030 PRIORITY: PRIORITIZING HOUSING

Having enough housing at each level of affordability, from subsidized affordable housing to rental units to starter homes and beyond, is a key attribute of a healthy and growing region. While Rhode Island's overall population growth has been slow, natural loss of units coupled with demand for housing from both Rhode Islanders and those from out of state has been strong. This increased demand has pushed up prices and reduced the available supply for Rhode Islanders across the state. For Rhode Island to be an attractive place to live, work, and raise a family, the State needs to address the availability, quality and affordability of housing while also paying particular attention to those Rhode Islanders with specific housing needs: those with less income, those with disabilities, those who want to age in their home, and those who are experiencing homelessness. Housing and homeownership also have important roles to play as we seek to create opportunities for families throughout Rhode Island – across the regions of our state and across income levels – and to build wealth for themselves and future generations.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

- Housing affordability is a statewide challenge across all income, racial, and age groups—but especially for low- and moderate-income households. Households of color are disproportionately impacted.
- Housing supply has consistently fallen short of demand, resulting from a range of barriers (e.g., financing challenges, workforce shortages, local planning, and zoning factors).
- Specific housing challenges face Rhode Island, including homelessness, inadequate senior housing, an aging housing stock, and inequity in homeownership rates.



## CURRENT STATE AGENCY INITIATIVES

Rhode Island has several programs and initiatives that address housing challenges in the state, including eviction assistance, affordable housing support, permanent supportive housing, and more. This includes deploying more than \$11.6 million in rental assistance through Safe Harbor and Housing Help RI and more than \$53 million (and counting) through Rent Relief RI to thousands of Rhode Island families throughout the pandemic; implementation of a five-year Pay for Success permanent supportive housing pilot; and efforts to eliminate health hazards (lead, asbestos, etc.) and improve accessibility in our housing stock.

**RI 2030 HOUSING GOAL:** By the next decade, Rhode Island will have a growing and ever-improving housing stock that is affordable, accessible, and meets the needs of all Rhode Islanders.

## HOUSING OBJECTIVES

- Establish a target level of housing production, drawing from pre-2008 levels as a reference point and through the development of a statewide housing plan informed by stakeholder and community input, to approach and meet the level of demand demonstrated across the array of income levels and communities.
- Reduce the percent of families in Rhode Island that are housing cost burdened.
- Reduce the disparity of homeownership rates for Rhode Island households of color.
- Increase the accessibility of Rhode Island's housing stock to seniors and those with disability challenges and reduce housing conditions contributing to health issues.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

The main issue facing many Rhode Islanders looking for housing is one of affordability driven by low supply. The lack of consumer spending and generous fiscal policy during the pandemic has increased demand for real estate. In addition, buyers from other states accounted for 26% of total sales in the second quarter of 2021, compared with 21% in the spring of 2020, and the average single-family home was on the market for only 27 days in June 2021, compared to over 50 days in June 2019 and 2020. Furthermore, Rhode Island's older housing stock needs updating with everything from disability access to weatherization to lead abatement. Finally, Rhode Island is facing a lack of skilled workers in the construction sector.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC (CONT.)

Building construction employment increased 28% from 2010, which is ahead of most New England states, but still lags behind Massachusetts and the country as a whole. While the increase in home prices has provided a boon for Rhode Island homeowners, the increase in housing prices exacerbates affordability challenges across income levels, as well as the lack of affordable housing, appropriate housing to allow people to age in place, and permanent supportive housing needed to reduce and eventually eliminate homelessness.

Homeownership is an important tool for building wealth. While homeownership rates in Rhode Island have been increasing since 2016 and are almost back to their pre-financial crisis high, there are large disparities by race and ethnicity. Moreover, approximately half of Rhode Island renters are cost burdened (spending over 30% of income on housing) and between 20-25% are severely cost burdened (spending over 50% of income on housing). Black and Latino owners are more likely to face a cost burden than White homeowners. In addition, Rhode Island's homeless shelter system is currently overburdened and, coupled with the broader housing system, does not meet demand. As of September 2021, there are 174 adults, 80 families with children, and 39 adult families currently living outdoors or in cars and on shelter waiting lists. After decreasing from 2017 to 2019, there was a 4.6% increase in homelessness in Rhode Island from 2019 to 2020, and the share of Black and Latino individuals experiencing homelessness exceeds their proportion of the state's population. We must do more to better serve the housing needs of Black and Latino Rhode Islanders.

In the short run, Rhode Islanders also face a potential wave of evictions as the federal moratorium ends. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Rhode Island had one of the highest rates of eviction in the region (3.04% in 2016 compared to 2.34% in the country and 1.52% in Massachusetts, according to Eviction Lab data), while the state currently faces a low rental vacancy rate of 2.2% in Q2 of 2021. The economic crisis as a result of COVID-19 has presented major challenges to keeping impacted Rhode Islanders in their homes. If there was any doubt that housing is an essential component of the social determinants of health, Rhode Island's experience during the pandemic has shown the importance of having a safe and stable home, not only to safely quarantine and isolate to mitigate the spread of the virus but also to take care of ourselves and our families' overarching health needs.

## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- Decrease the housing disparities by race and ethnicity that are currently common in the state.
- Increase the availability and ease of applying for financing for projects that advance the state's housing goals and would otherwise not be funded.
- Explore ways in which former commercial real estate can be creatively converted into residential housing.



## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (CONT.)

- Decrease the housing disparities by race and ethnicity that are currently common in the state.
- Increase the availability and ease of applying for financing for projects that advance the state's housing goals and would otherwise not be funded.
- Explore ways in which former commercial real estate can be creatively converted into residential housing.

## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- Increase housing production overall
  - Establish a statewide plan for increasing housing production and meeting the needs of Rhode Islanders in all 39 cities and towns, drawing upon stakeholder and community input.
  - Work with interested cities and towns across the state to create a more favorable planning, zoning, and development environment.
  - Invest in infrastructure so that more and denser housing can be built where there is demand while paying particular attention to current and future transit locations and economic development plans.
  - Support builders in conducting workforce development and help them find and train the carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and others who will build the housing we need.
  - Work with builders and educational institutions to invest in the construction workforce by creating internship opportunities for those interested in going into the trades.
- Increase affordable housing production in particular
  - Increase funding for affordable and supportive housing to levels that are, on a proportionate basis, equal to or exceed our neighboring states.
  - Utilize publicly owned property to develop affordable housing. Doing so may require legislative changes to property disposition processes as well as proactive analysis, technical assistance, and investments in preparing sites for development.
  - Explore innovative models to enable the acquisition of properties for development or conversion to affordable housing and accelerate their development.
  - Streamline the application process for affordable housing financing and development. Reduce the number of forms and application processes and explore unified or “one-stop” solutions.
  - Engage interested municipalities in a robust dialogue about how to reach the state's affordable housing goals and how municipalities can help achieve these goals. To be successful, cities and towns need the tools to focus on zoning within their local context so that more housing can be built in areas where there is demand and land. Work with municipalities on thoughtful reforms to land use, permitting, and code enforcement processes. Explore ways to increase incentives for interested municipalities to provide affordable housing to meet municipal and statewide goals, including measures such as accessory dwelling units (ADUs).
  - Invest in increased staff capacity at state, municipal, nonprofit, and development partners.

## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS (CONT.)

- Decrease homeownership racial disparities
  - Invest in significant levels of down-payment and other assistance to help bridge the racial and income-based divide in homeownership.
  - Expand opportunities for financial literacy and homebuyer training, homeowner counseling, and mortgage assistance products that take into consideration non-traditional income and credit histories, in multiple languages.
- Prevent homelessness
  - Create a centralized diversion assistance initiative to help households remain housed and to prevent homelessness.
  - Expand funding for rental assistance programs as well as services delivered through permanent supportive housing.
  - Increase availability of housing-based solutions in addition to shelter-based solutions and supportive solutions.
- Support healthy and accessible housing
  - Increase funding for property owners to make improvements to existing housing, including weatherization, lead abatement, and disability access.

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"When we talk about housing affordability challenges, whether it's affordable housing or for-sale housing, it really is limitations on the availability of supply, and without additional construction, we're really not going to be able to address these affordability challenges."

**-Robert Dietz, Chief Economist and Senior Vice President for Economics and Housing Policy, National Association of Home Builders / Community Conversation Participant**

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"I think zoning is the racial justice issue of our time and... when I look at those numbers around homeownership rates for minorities in the state, which have not significantly budged since the late 1960s...that means that generations of families have been left out of the one solid way of creating wealth and stability for your family."

**- Brenda Clement, Director, HousingWorks RI / Community Conversation Participant**

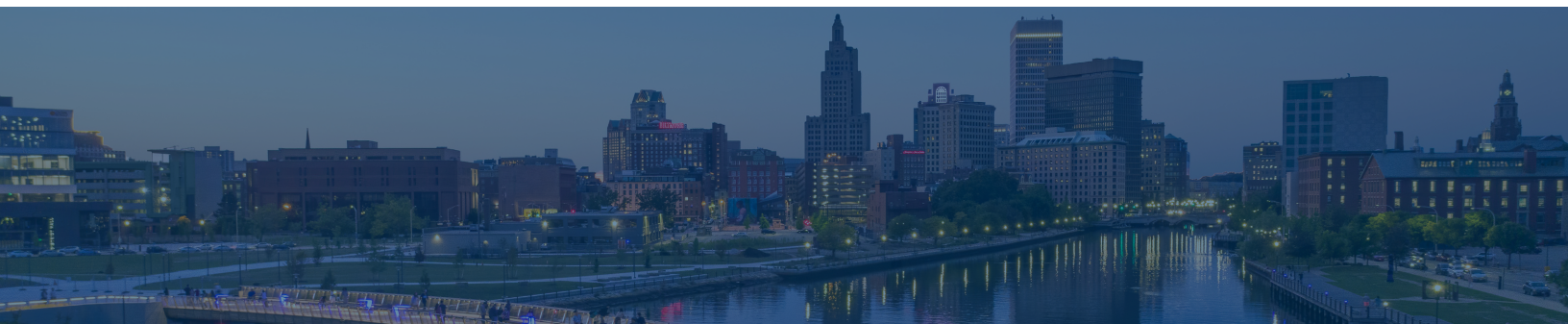
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# RI 2030 PRIORITY: DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH

Before the pandemic, the Rhode Island economy and labor market were in a strong position. In 2019, the state's unemployment rate stood at 3.6% (the lowest level in more than three decades), and employment was at an all-time high in the state. Despite the progress Rhode Island has made recovering from both the Great Recession and decades of impact from technological transformation and the loss of manufacturing jobs, several weaknesses in the economy persist, some of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. For example, Rhode Island has lower average household income than our southern New England neighbors, in part because our firms and workers are less productive. There are also enduring inequities in Rhode Island's economy. Whereas the White unemployment rate was 3.3% in 2019, the Black/African American unemployment rate was 4.6%, and the Hispanic/Latino unemployment rate was 6.1%.

A key reason Rhode Island has historically struggled with regaining economic momentum following the loss of manufacturing jobs stems from the fact that, despite meaningful strengths, Rhode Island is not home to deep regional specializations in the same way as some other states with more mature and potent focuses. These specializations drive economic growth by drawing on the region's relative strengths, which may be a result of geography, history, accident, or coordinated planning. Well-known examples of regional clusters include biotechnology in Boston, finance in New York, and Silicon Valley technology in the San Francisco area. Regional clusters foster productivity and innovation, as firms benefit from a skilled labor market and a high density of suppliers and customers. In addition, workers find it easier to find good jobs in the positions and firms that best suit them.

Regional industry clusters often result from careful economic development planning. Historically, Rhode Island has benefited from industry clusters such as traditional textiles and jewelry (where it still enjoys a regional advantage), but these are no longer major drivers of economic growth. Today, there are significant opportunities in advanced textile clusters, as well as new industries in the Blue Economy and biosciences. By focusing our efforts on building a regional advantage in these industries and working across sectors to increase productivity, the state can ensure a thriving economy that will have the resources to support the kind of state in which we all want to live and work in 2030 and beyond.



## WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

- The State has made progress expanding traditional industries, supporting small businesses, and cultivating advanced industries. This broad-based approach is necessary to ensure a strong recovery and a prosperous, dynamic, and resilient economy over the long term.
- For success over the long-term, Rhode Island must prioritize building an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable economy -- with special focuses on innovation, entrepreneurship, and expanded opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups and marginalized communities.
- Rhode Island has geographic, research, workforce, and business advantages when it comes to the Blue Economy, especially in ocean science, maritime, offshore wind, and defense, and the state also benefits from its growing expertise and proximity to the major metropolitan areas of New York City and Boston for industries like life sciences, tech, and advanced business services.

## CURRENT STATE AGENCY INITIATIVES

Rhode Island has a broad range of initiatives in place to support the state's recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and drive economic growth over the long-term. To support Rhode Island's economic recovery, the state (1) implemented a careful reopening strategy that enabled businesses and consumers to safely resume economic activity, (2) provided more than \$140 million in funds to assist more than 9,000 small businesses and pandemic-impacted organizations, and (3) assisted small businesses with accessing key federal programs like the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), Restaurant Revitalization Fund (RRF), and Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG) program.

Rhode Island also has many programs in place to catalyze economic growth over the long-term, including: (1) tax credit programs like the Investment Tax Credit, the Qualified Jobs Incentive Tax Credit, and the Rebuild RI Tax Credit; (2) innovation-oriented programs like the Industry Cluster Grants program, the Innovation Campus initiative, the Innovation Network Matching Grants program, and the Innovation Voucher program; and (3) thoughtful reforms to improve the state's business climate, such as repealing the sales tax on energy and eliminating more than 150 regulations. Key initiatives under development by the State are intended to promote economic and racial equity by assisting small and minority-owned businesses, aid unemployed and underemployed Rhode Islanders and increase economic opportunities in low-income communities.

**RI 2030 ECONOMIC GROWTH GOAL:** Rhode Island will have an ever-more prosperous, equitable, and resilient economy with more economic opportunity and family-sustaining jobs for Rhode Islanders where businesses – both big and small – can thrive and meet the many challenges of the 21st century, from climate change to technological innovation.

## ECONOMIC GROWTH OBJECTIVES

- Fully recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Lead the region in median wage and household income growth.
- Reduce enduring inequities throughout Rhode Island's economy including the disparate levels of unemployment, wages, wealth, and business ownership by race, ethnicity, and gender.
- Strengthen our position as the national leader in the Blue Economy and grow key industry clusters such as bioscience and advanced manufacturing.
- Increase the resiliency of Rhode Island's industry sectors, such as tourism, that are especially susceptible to seasonality and economic downturns.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

A key short-run problem for the Rhode Island economy is centered on the labor market. The pre-COVID Rhode Island economy saw employment at an all-time high of 507,000 jobs and an unemployment rate of just 4% in February 2020. Two months later, those numbers were 399,200 jobs (-21%) and an unemployment rate of 17.4%. While the state has experienced a strong recovery, in July 2021 employment was at 478,700 (5.6% below the peak) and the unemployment rate was 5.8%. Federal and state relief programs, for both businesses and individuals, proved effective for many (but not all) Rhode Islanders, and total personal income rose from \$61 billion in Q1 2020 to \$71.7 billion in Q1 2021. Combined with a lack of spending opportunities during the pandemic, this has led to a large amount of pent-up demand.

While Rhode Island's 2019 median household income of \$71,169 exceeded that of the U.S. (\$65,712), its income lags those of neighboring states like New York (\$72,108), Connecticut (\$78,833), and Massachusetts (\$85,843). In the long run, the state must work – in partnership with industry, labor, community stakeholders, and others – to increase economic growth and productivity – with an eye towards lifting household income and increasing the number of higher-wage, family-sustaining jobs for Rhode Islanders. Rhode Island has lower worker productivity than its New England neighbors, with many Rhode Islanders currently working in lower productivity industries. Output per employee had fallen between 2010 and 2016 before rising modestly before the pandemic. In addition, the population of the state is projected to grow slowly until 2035 and then start to slowly decline. Those who are typical working age (20-64) are projected to fall from 59% of the population to 55% of the population, posing additional challenges.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC (CONT.)

Rhode Island has already done significant work in identifying its strategic advantages and potential growth industries, including (1) the Blue Economy focused on the ocean and offshore wind, (2) Life Sciences, (3) IT, Data Analytics, and Cyber Security, (4) Design, Food, and Custom Manufacturing, and (5) Advanced Business Services. While these industries still represent a relatively small percentage of the Rhode Island economy in terms of employment, they show strong growth potential in terms of employment and productivity. These sectors take advantage of Rhode Island's geographic location and expertise as the Ocean State as well as the state's strategic position between the two metropolitan areas of Boston and New York City.

Successful regional clusters attract new and existing firms to the area by offering access to talented workers, critical infrastructure, and relevant trade groups. In addition, a focus on the Blue Economy has the potential to benefit Rhode Island in a world that is increasingly affected by climate change. Several industry groups, such as the Southeastern New England Defense Industry Alliance and the Rhode Island Marine Trades Association, already focus on areas of the Blue Economy (defense and marine trades) while other industry groups have grown up focusing on advanced manufacturing (such as Polaris MEP) and design (DesignXRI).

The global pandemic has had a significant and varied impact on Rhode Island's economy. While some sectors like construction and manufacturing quickly rebounded and have already recovered the jobs lost during the pandemic (in fact, the state's construction industry currently has the highest number of jobs on record since 2007), the leisure and hospitality industry is still 9,300 jobs below its pre-pandemic peak.

There is also considerable uncertainty about the future of office work and the small businesses, workers, and downtown districts that depend upon offices and the foot traffic they generate (e.g., restaurants, custodial services, dry cleaners). According to an analysis by Harvard's Project on Workforce, 32% of Rhode Island's workforce can work remotely. Additionally, according to the Providence Foundation's survey of downtown employers, 62% of respondents plan on offering hybrid work arrangements. The shift to new work arrangements and workplace practices may have impacts on office districts, urban downtowns, and main street corridors that serve as centers for office work and the small businesses that cater to this segment of the economy.

Finally, the pandemic has had a disproportionate economic impact on women and people of color. Whereas the unemployment rate for men was 9.1% in 2020, this figure stood at 9.6% for women. Additionally, while the unemployment rate for white people was 8.6% in 2020, this figure was 9.4% for Black/African American people, 9.9% for Asian people, and 15.2% for Hispanic/Latino people. Addressing these and other economic disparities should be a central focus to support an inclusive and broad-based economic recovery and to advance economic growth over the long-term.



## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- Fund programs that train and match unemployed workers and others re-entering the labor force with firms that are having trouble finding the workers they need through additional funding for programs like Real Jobs RI and Back to Work RI.
- Identify government rules, regulations, and practices at both the state and local levels that were changed during the pandemic and that can remain changed in the long run to benefit both businesses and consumers.
- Provide direct and technical assistance to small businesses and impacted industries that have seen a pandemic-related drop in revenue and that need financing to survive.
- Continue providing key supports (e.g., rental assistance, SNAP benefits) to COVID-impacted workers and households to help them weather the economic downturn.

## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- Invest in Blue Economy and Bioscience innovation campuses and other initiatives to spur innovation and workforce development in these clusters.
- Expand workforce development programs with both high school and post-secondary education with a focus on identified industry growth clusters to increase productivity with a particular emphasis on disadvantaged groups.
- Facilitate private capital financing – including the creation of a venture fund or early-stage growth fund – to foster growth clusters. Such a fund might be based in the private or non-profit sectors.
- In conjunction with efforts to support small businesses, continue to implement targeted policy reforms – from supporting lower energy costs to partnering with cities and towns on sensible municipal tax reforms and beyond – that make the cost of doing business in Rhode Island more competitive with other peer states.
- Develop a new or support an existing Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) to specifically support small business owners from historically disadvantaged groups.
- Work with municipalities on site readiness to prepare sites for development to attract new and growing firms in innovative industries such as the Blue Economy, life sciences, and advanced manufacturing.
- Create a GlobalRI initiative to expand the state’s ability to secure foreign direct investment and to increase Rhode Island firm exports by increasing training and networking opportunities.

## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS (CONT.)

- Expand SupplyRI to increase the number of small and minority-owned businesses benefiting from procurement connections to anchor institutions, firms in high-growth industries, and the public sector. This will entail conducting intensive industry-specific supply chain analysis to identify key opportunities, boosting the number of SupplyRI events, increasing staffing to provide additional technical assistance, and integrating access to capital into SupplyRI program offerings.
- Execute a tourism marketing plan for domestic and international markets that differentiates Rhode Island from other states by focusing on our competitive strengths: environmental and coastal assets, culinary offerings, arts, history, and culture, as well as our proximity to the international markets of New York City and Boston.
- Enhance and establish attractions and destination events that bring tourists to the state, especially during the “shoulder” weeks and off-season time frames. Examples of existing events to potentially strengthen include seafood festivals in South County, a public art festival in Providence, the Glass Float Project by Eben Horton on Block Island, Newport Mansions art exhibits, the Sandcastle Competition in South County, and the Polar Express in Blackstone Valley, while examples of new events include an international design convention or a global maritime convention.

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"Clean energy is going to be an important driver to our economy, climates, and investments over the course of the next couple decades. Rhode Island has an advantage in clean energy, and that's offshore wind. It's got the only fully operational offshore wind farm in the United States. The Biden Administration has made the environment and clean energy a priority. Rhode Island's got the expertise to contribute to its growth." - **Joseph Zidle, Chief Investment Strategist, Blackstone Group / Community Conversation Participant**

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"Everyone has a role in our economic recovery. It's going to take every state leader, every city and town leader...every citizen to really work together on making sure that we exploring these industries and we are setting ourselves up for success." - **Suzy Alba, President, Smithfield Town Council / Community Conversation Participant**

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# RI 2030 PRIORITY: ENHANCING PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The global pandemic has emphasized the importance of our public health systems and access to services that drive optimal health for all Rhode Islanders. Working to ensure that Rhode Islanders are healthy includes providing accessible and affordable, quality health care for all Rhode Islanders, focusing on the social determinants of health – where people, live, work and play at the community level, and carrying out our work with a race equity lens. Together, these strategies can drastically improve our quality of life.

High-quality healthcare – beginning with primary care, community health clinics, behavioral health services, and oral health providers, and ensuring access to hospitals and nursing homes when necessary, will create a more balanced public health system, where care is provided how and when it is needed and help attract professionals and other people to the state. Although Rhode Island's rate of those without health insurance has declined significantly since 2008, the last 18 months have emphasized the importance of health and health infrastructure in Rhode Island and beyond.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

- The pandemic highlighted significant challenges for Rhode Island's health system (e.g., health disparities, a behavioral health crisis, unequal access, solvency of providers, particularly primary care providers) but also showed opportunities for innovation (e.g., telehealth, enhanced partnerships).
- Rhode Island's health system requires additional investments to expand capacity, address workforce shortages, ensure diversity, and tackle the many challenges highlighted by the pandemic.
- Race equity, health access, and a focus on social determinants of health, including access to safe and affordable housing, are key components of a successful health system.



## CURRENT STATE AGENCY INITIATIVES

Rhode Island’s health-focused state agencies have a broad and diverse set of health initiatives, with significant interagency communication and alignment to ensure maximum effectiveness toward our shared goals, all carried out with a race equity lens. While a complete list is in the appendix, some of the most critical initiatives include the shared focused on social determinants of health through the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) Accountable Entities, the Health Equity Zones, and the State Data Ecosystem.

**RI 2030 PUBLIC HEALTH & WELLNESS GOAL:** By the next decade, Rhode Island will have a health system that supports affordable and accessible services to maximize good health outcomes for all Rhode Islanders, emphasizing preventive care, addressing social determinants of health, supporting our healthcare providers and increasing their diversity, and eliminating health disparities.

## PUBLIC HEALTH & WELLNESS OBJECTIVES

- Eliminate health disparities and promote health equity by race, ethnicity, languages spoken, sexual orientation and gender identity, and geography for all Rhode Islanders.
- Move toward a unified state health system that prioritizes Prevention and Primary Care, and Physical and Behavioral Health System Transformation as it simplifies access, payment, and data collection and analysis by:
  - Addressing Rhode Island’s workforce challenges
  - Continuing to rebalance the provision of healthcare from the most restrictive and expensive services toward prevention and home and community-based services and to support

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“The pandemic really challenged healthcare delivery and capacity in Rhode Island. While telehealth was one of the silver linings, we must recognize the gaps in services for behavioral health, including community step down facilities, and the shortages in our workforces. The pandemic especially highlighted the shortage of linguistically- and clinically-competent providers across the board, particularly in the area of behavioral health. This has clearly disproportionately impacted communities of color.” -**Teresa Paiva-Weed, President, Hospital Association of Rhode Island / Community Conversation Participant**

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## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic showed both the strengths and weaknesses of the Rhode Island health system. From March 2020 through October 2021, over 17% of Rhode Islanders have tested positive for COVID-19 and since December 2020, almost 80% have been at least partially vaccinated against the disease. The state was able to step up with high-quality COVID-19 testing and treatment, but the pandemic highlighted inequities in access to care. It also emphasized the necessity of ensuring the availability of quality behavioral health services across the lifespan (for children, youth, families, and single adults) addressing mental health and substance use. Here are descriptions of some of the highest areas of need as Rhode Island emerges from the pandemic:

**Workforce Shortages:** The pandemic highlighted struggles of nursing homes and hospitals to address workforce shortages and retain the workforce necessary to provide safe and quality care during the pandemic, as they experienced Emergency Department and hospital bed overcrowding from the COVID-19 surges and behavioral health and overdose challenges. Providers of home and community-based services for behavioral health and long-term care have also experienced significant and sustained workforce shortages throughout the pandemic. The lack of capacity for home and community-based services exacerbates the pressure on health care institutions.

**Behavioral Health System Challenges:** EOHHS's recently released Rhode Island Behavioral Health System Review documents Rhode Island's behavioral health opportunities as well as the system capacity challenges and gaps in key service lines. The stresses arising from COVID-19 underscored the tremendous need for more behavioral health services – and made the workforce shortages worse. In particular, Rhode Island has a shortage of linguistically and culturally competent providers, that together disproportionately negatively impact communities of color. The underlying drivers that worsen these challenges are state agency fragmentation, need for payment reform and increased rates for some services, insufficiently modern infrastructure of behavioral health providers,

**Rising Numbers of Overdoses:** One critical component of the state's behavioral health crisis is our overdose epidemic – and combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, together they are a syndemic. Starting in November 2019, the Governor's Overdose Task Force Co-Chairs and other members recognized that accidental fatal drug overdoses were rising. During the fall of 2020, the Task Force Co-Chairs asked the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to examine the rising numbers with an Evidence Update and Strategic Program Review. The review identified fentanyl, Covid isolation, and structural racism as the key drivers of the rising numbers of deaths, all made more challenging by the need to strengthen the governance system for the work.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC (CONT.)

**Oral Health Disparities:** Historically, oral health has been deprioritized for health system reform—despite large and inequitable access issues remaining—and is fragmented from both the physical and behavioral health systems. The last significant investment in oral health was a 1992 rate change within Medicaid. In Rhode Island, significant disparities exist in oral health which create further fundamental inequities pertaining to the overall health, employment, education, and social identification of our State’s vulnerable populations—including racial/ethnic minorities, low income and older adults and, those with behavioral health conditions. These populations tend to have highest rates of dental disease. The majority are also Medicaid recipients who struggle to find dental care due to low dental participation in the Medicaid program. As COVID-19 spread, dental offices were shut down for many months, and while some offices turned to tele-dentistry, many older providers decided to retire, shrink staffing, sell their practices, or close completely. Post-pandemic, dental needs are high among patients because of stress-related impact on teeth, lack of preventive services, and increasing poor dietary choices while home during lockdown. Increasing access is needed for those who may speak another language besides English, live in a high-density community, be in a lower socio-economic status, have a developmental disability, substance use disorder, and/or have other social determinants that may have prevented them from seeking dental care in the past.

**Rhode Island’s Aging Population:** In addition, Rhode Island has an aging population, with the highest percentage of people over 85 years old in New England. Even before the pandemic, groups such as the AARP provided data showing that an overwhelming number of seniors prefer to age in place. This trend has increased during the pandemic, as the state saw a drop in nursing home admissions. The state must take the needs and preferences of its long-term care population into consideration in future investments in the health field, especially as the need for these services continues to increase.

**Health System Issues:** While the rates of those who are uninsured are at a very low level, there are still issues with access and affordability for many Rhode Islanders. Access may be limited due to travel requirements, language, culture, or cost, especially high co-pays and deductibles. Continued vertical and horizontal consolidation in Rhode Island’s healthcare markets, including the proposed merger of two large healthcare providers in the state, will also have a significant impact on costs, access, and quality for healthcare in the years to come. One way to reduce the overall cost of healthcare is to make sure everyone has easy and regular access to preventive care so that the system can address issues before they become acute – and that we particularly invest in preventive care and services for pregnant women and children. This is true for both physical and behavioral health.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC (CONT.)

Health Innovations Healthcare: providers across the state did find new and innovative ways to deliver healthcare, some of which should continue when the pandemic comes to an end. Examples of these pandemic-related innovations include the statewide COVID-19 testing and contact tracing program, enhanced public-private partnerships, and expanded telehealth opportunities.

Disparities in Social Determinants of Health: The pandemic has highlighted the need to focus more closely on the social determinants of health and disparities by geography, race, ethnicity, and education. For example, lack of affordable, safe, and healthy housing contributes to poor health outcomes such as overdoses and infectious disease spread (as demonstrated during the pandemic), as well as reincarceration, stigma, and further systemic oppression. Rhode Island has seen a four-fold increase in street homelessness since the 2019 Point in Time Count and the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the awareness of homelessness as a public health issue and the state's shelter system, already at capacity, was mandated to reduce beds by 146. Consequently, there are approximately 500 individuals and families living in a hotel or sleeping in places not meant for human habitation. As a result, Black or African American and Other/Multiple Races experience a higher burden of homelessness in various settings, particularly given their representation in Rhode Island compared to White counterparts. This is unacceptable and requires systemic change.

## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- Focus upstream on root causes and investing in affordable housing, food security, and transportation to address underlying inequities and influencers of health disparities.
- Expand immediate housing stabilization and homelessness services to implement Housing First and address community-identified priorities that will improve the health, social, and economic security of Rhode Islanders.
- Invest in health literacy campaigns and programs for all Rhode Island communities as the state pushes towards 100% vaccination rates.
- Continue to support the integration of physical and behavioral health
- Investing in physical, behavioral, and oral health system transformation as detailed throughout this document, including:
- Ensure that all Rhode Islanders have access to quality primary care and is going to a well-visit at least once a year
  - Prioritize investments in the Rhode Island System of Care for Children and Youth Plan
  - Support a statewide Behavioral Health Mobile Crisis System, tied in to the new 988 3-digit emergency phone number created by Congress



## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (CONT.)

- Addressing Rhode Island's workforce challenges.
  - Stabilizing the Direct Care Workforce to increase access to home and community-based services.
  - Addressing the gaps in services identified in the recently completed Rhode Island Behavioral Health System Review that include gaps in key service lines and a shortage of linguistically and culturally competent providers, that together disproportionately negatively impact communities of color.
  - Making direct care work and family caregiving work expert, valued, supported, and encouraged.
  
- Continuing to rebalance the provision of healthcare from the most restrictive and expensive services toward prevention and home and community-based services, and to support.
  - Pursue Value-Based Payment health system transformations.
    - Continue toward the state's goal to spend 50% of Medicaid funding for Rhode Islanders over 65 in home and community-based settings (set forth in RIGL 40-8.9-9)
    - Prospective budget-based payment, with quality-linked financial implications, should be the primary advanced value-based payment model used for all provider types wherever feasible.
    - Continue to secure federal funding in pediatrics, family home visiting, and Early Intervention to ensure that children have access to services that promote healthy development, and to supplement pediatric practices in vaccinating children ahead of expected approval of the COVID-19 vaccine for children under 12 years of age.

## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- Move forward on Social Determinants of Health
  - Together, expand and sustain whole of government and cross-sector investments in place-based, defined geographic areas to develop sustainable infrastructure and align a diverse set of resources that support community-identified priorities and positively impact the socioeconomic and environmental conditions driving disparities and poor health outcomes in Rhode Island. Additionally, ensure Rhode Island is poised for future investments.
  - Target investments in social determinants for health, especially in housing, transportation, clean air, and teams of community health workers to support existing investments through Health Equity Zones to create healthy communities.

## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- Continue to spark innovation in Rhode Island's health system.
  - Continue system reforms in integrated health, behavioral health for adults and children, and long-term services and supports, with significant investments in these programs and the workforce that provides them.
  - Continue to implement the Behavioral Health System of Care for Children and Youth, the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, and the recommendations of the Governor's Overdose Task Force.
  - Meet our goals of expanding value-based payment reforms, redirecting investments away from institutional settings and towards prevention and primary care, and expanding access (e.g., to oral health services).
  - Through the Medicaid Accountable Entity program and its Health System Transformation Project, regulations through the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner, and the Rhode Island Cost Trends Committee, continue to promote the growth of provider-led practices where care coordination and care management can be closer to the patient.
  - Solidify a sustainable funding source for the Rhode Island Health Care Cost Trends Project.
  - Support the implementation of the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner's Next Generation Affordability Standards.
  - Continue the state's commitment to data-driven decision-making, by ongoing investments in the State Data Ecosystem.
  - Invest in one-time technology enhancements that increase efficiency in accessing services, eliminate outdated legacy systems, and improve the customer experience.
- Ensure care for priority populations:
  - Use a race equity lens to address the needs of Rhode Islanders who experience structural racism and provide culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate care within all health systems.
  - Provide trauma-informed care and make trauma-informed policies to address the needs of Rhode Islanders who live with the impact of trauma on their lives.
  - Address and counter the bias and discrimination against Rhode Islanders who use substances and who are made to feel stigmatized.
  - Ensure access to services for and counter the bias and discrimination against Rhode Islanders who are undocumented.
  - Develop a strategy to ensure services continue to meet the demands of the aging population in Rhode Island
    - Collaborate with EOHHS to enhance the State's Aging and Disability Resource Center, The POINT, to assist our aging adults with long-term care options and decisions.
    - Work closely with Rhode Island Housing and other community housing partners to address homelessness and the impact it has on older adults in Rhode Island.
    - Diversify Office of Health Aging contracted partner networks to ensure all older Rhode Islanders and adults with disabilities feel included and have their needs met.

## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS (CONT.)

- Collaborate with federal partners at the Veterans Administration on behavioral health services for veterans, members of the military, and their families.
  - Focus on behavioral health care, particularly for mid-acuity patients, individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury, and those with dementia.
  - Ensure transient populations (college students, immigrants, military, etc.) in Rhode Island can access adequate care.
- Ensure appropriate interconnectivity within and regulatory oversight of the health system:
    - Monitor the competitive landscape in health care services to better address cost increases and keep health care as affordable as possible.
    - Develop and implement regulatory oversight capacity.
    - Ensure information sharing across systems of care through health information technology is efficient, effective, and appropriate.
    - Develop mechanisms to connect and analyze data, monitor quality measures performance and health outcomes, and innovate programs to identify and address emerging trends.

“We need to think differently about public health and healthcare and how they intersect. If we look back at the greatest success of our state over the last 16 months, those came from moments of innovation and cross-sectoral collaboration. I would say that looking forward, we must think about public health and healthcare as not being two separate things but rather being synonymous.” - **Dr. Megan Ranney, Director, Brown-Lifespan Center for Digital Health; Warren Alpert Endowed Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine, Brown University / Community Conversation Participant**

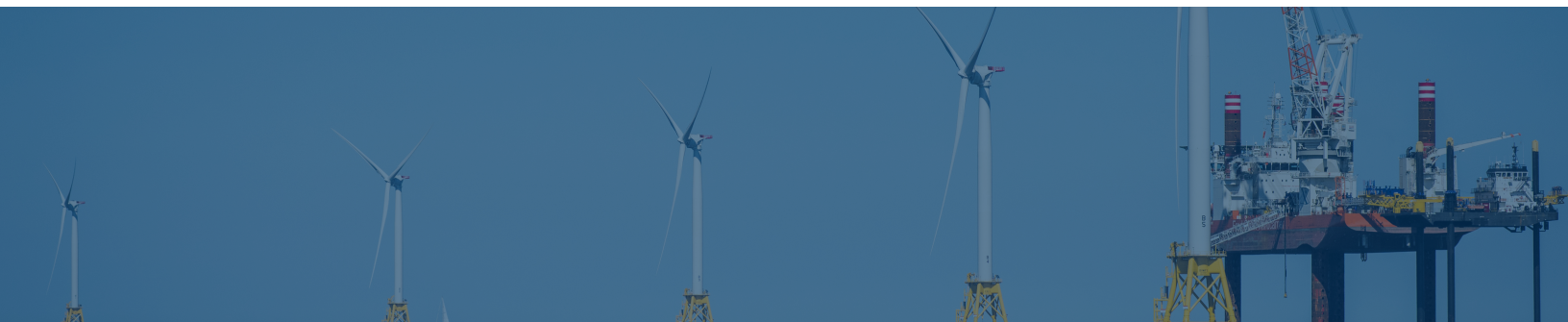
# RI 2030 PRIORITY: ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE

The costs of climate change are becoming clearer and clearer as the planet warms and significant weather events increase in their intensity and frequency. While some areas are likely to experience drought conditions, the northeastern part of the United States is likely to see increased rain and flooding in the coming decades. As a coastal state, Rhode Island will have to make the decisions and investments necessary to protect its communities, economy, and the natural environment, grounded in values of environmental justice throughout.

There are many aspects of climate change that make it particularly difficult to address. Unlike pollution that stays in the local air or water, greenhouse gases (GHG) add up across the globe to affect the entire planet. While Rhode Island can and should do its part to reduce these gases, we are not able to eliminate the problem single-handedly. Climate change is also a problem that has been building since the dawn of the industrial revolution – for example, fossil fuels burned over the last 200 years are still having an effect and warming the planet. Our society is now facing the very real consequences of widespread, generational impacts on our atmosphere, and we in the Ocean State must be part of the solution.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

- Climate change policies need to be equitable and make sure that they benefit all Rhode Islanders and no group is left holding an unfair share of the costs.
- As a coastal state, Rhode Island needs to be prepared for the flooding, rising seas, and increased storms that will come from climate change.
- Rhode Island is well-positioned to take advantage of the opportunities that addressing climate change head-on presents, including offshore wind, coastal resiliency, and sustainable aquaculture.
- Reaching net zero emissions by 2050 will require significant investments in changes to home heating, electricity generation, and transportation.



## CURRENT STATE AGENCY INITIATIVES

The 2021 Act on Climate updated Rhode Island's climate-emission reduction goals, positioning the state to boldly address climate change and prepare for a global economy that will be shifting to adapt to clean technology. Under the 2021 Act on Climate, the state will develop a plan to incrementally reduce climate emissions to net-zero by 2050, including measures to address environmental injustices and public health inequities. The plan will be updated every 5 years and will address areas such as environmental injustices, public health inequities and a fair employment transition as fossil-fuel jobs are replaced by green energy jobs. The Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council (EC4) charged with producing this plan, will, as of September 2021, meet more frequently and in locations across the state to encourage robust public engagement throughout. At the September 2021 EC4 meeting, the EC4 Advisory Board presented a draft set of climate justice priorities to the EC4, to be further socialized and refined in furtherance of advancing environmental justice.

**RI 2030 CLIMATE GOAL: By the next decade, Rhode Island will be a national leader in renewable electricity generation, will be on the path to net zero emissions by 2050, and will be making the investments needed to protect its coast and other areas under threat by climate change, particularly environmental justice communities.**

## CLIMATE OBJECTIVES

- Codify and implement a 100% Renewable Energy Standard by 2030 and examine opportunities for a renewable thermal standard and/or clean peak standard or similar policy mechanism to reduce emissions across sectors, particularly heating and transportation.
- Replace fossil fuel electricity generation with renewable resources, while recognizing the benefit of protected green space.
- Protect people and infrastructure in coastal and riverine communities from storms and floods due to climate change.
- Modernize the electrical grid to support increased use of electricity, renewable energy generation, and battery storage and explore opportunities to invest in advanced metering functionalities.
- Reduce the cost of electricity to encourage transition away from fossil fuels.
- Invest in wastewater treatment facilities that are resilient to threat from climate change and protects coastal waterways.
- Reduce our consumption of single-use plastics.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

Rhode Island has adopted aggressive goals to address climate change. The 2021 Act on Climate has established incremental greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets culminating in a net-zero standard by 2050. In addition, there are several nonprofit organizations, agencies, businesses, and municipalities focused on the effects of climate change in the state. We now need to make the necessary investments to achieve these ambitious goals while also preparing the state for the inevitable impacts driven by global climate change.

Just as climate change will inevitably bring increased costs to Rhode Island, it also brings opportunities. Investments in renewable electricity generation, as well as electric transportation and heating, will not only provide business and employment opportunities for Rhode Islanders, but it will also put the state in a much better position for the future in terms of climate resilience. It must be noted that climate change is having a significant impact on broader economic and societal systems. For example, increased pollution and changing weather patterns are affecting air quality, which, in turn, fosters public health challenges such as increased asthma, increased exposure to pollen and mold, and diminished lung functioning. This is especially true for at-risk populations, such as the elderly, children, and those suffering from heart or lung disease.

Furthermore, we must do more to address the inequitable impacts of a changing climate on frontline and historically marginalized communities. These often include low-income communities and communities of color that face the brunt of pollution and climate change impacts, but face significant barriers in accessing the necessary tools, resources, and investments needed to address them. It is crucial that Rhode Island's future mitigation and resiliency investments center on equity and foster more equitable outcomes for people and businesses in these communities.

## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- **Implement the Act on Climate:** In upcoming budgets, the state needs to identify new positions and funding so the Department of Environmental Management, Office of Energy Resources and other Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council-related agencies can continue to make progress on meeting the state's ambitious climate goals. Support for FTEs, outside consultant services, and economic incentives (e.g. electric vehicles, electric heat pumps, renewable energy) should all be considered.
- **Procure utility-scale offshore wind.** This will leverage cross-state market development with strong local economic development impacts, advancing the state toward 100% renewable energy.
- **Pass 100% Renewable Energy Standard** to ensure we are on track to decarbonize the power sector as we work toward net-zero by 2050.

## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- Identify sustainable funding to incentivize thermal electrification. This will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, create jobs, and fill a funding gap that would advance the market for decarbonized heating solutions in the state.
- Continue investment in foundational energy efficiency. Rhode Island has been recognized as a national leader for its energy efficiency programs, which support economic recovery, reduce utility bills, build financial resilience, and support clean energy jobs – 6 out of every 10 clean energy jobs created in Rhode Island pre-COVID.

## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- The creation of a whole of government approach to resilience and mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions will be required if Rhode Island wants to meet its statutorily required reduction targets. As resources are dedicated to housing, infrastructure and transportation, and workforce development, ensure that these investments are being made with climate change in mind so that we are properly preparing Rhode Island for the future. This means building energy efficiency and renewable energy generation into our long-term planning, particularly the state's housing plan, and ensuring the economic benefits and job growth that come with Rhode Island's clean energy future are fairly distributed across the state.
  - Make the necessary investments in our coastal resources to help protect them from the effects of climate change with a specific focus on ensuring that low-income neighborhoods do not bear the brunt of the effects of climate change.
  - Assemble a state agency steering committee focused on the topic of voluntary buyouts and property acquisition for floodplain easements by developing guidance and running possible pilot programs for voluntary buyouts as an adaptation option designed to minimize risk of losses in existing and future coastal and riverine floodplains resulting from rising seas and more frequent and intense storm events.
  - Electrification of personal and public transportation as well as home and business heating.
  - Fully fund The Ocean State Climate Adaptation and Resilience (OSCAR) Fund and pass the Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector through a cap-and-invest model that will accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles and other zero emission vehicles.
  - Support efforts and initiatives that drive down electricity rates.



## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS (CONT.)

- Investments made in the Blue Economy should be made to help prepare the state for the effects that will come with climate change. This goes beyond development of an offshore wind supply chain; there will be a variety of employment opportunities at all levels as the Blue (and Green) Economy grows, and it will be crucial to begin strengthening those career pathways now to ensure our success in 2030 and beyond.
  - Focus on needed climate-related job skills training in programs such as Real Jobs RI and Pathways RI including solar roof installation, electricians, and construction, particularly for frontline communities.
  - Continue and expand financial incentives for individuals to install rooftop solar and switch to electric vehicles while working with public-private partnerships to provide the charging infrastructure that will be needed for electric vehicles.

“There’s a huge drive to produce technologies, the supply chain, vessels, transportation, manufacturing to be completely zero carbon in the future. So as this enormous industry comes into our front yard, we’ll be pushed to develop and support true green technologies to support that industry.” - **Drew Carey, CEO, INSPIRE Environmental / Community Conversation Participant**

“What we really need is climate in all policies in a way similar to we’re seeing in the Biden Administration, where climate is part of transportation, it’s part of economic developments. There’s no green economy— it’s the economy. All the investments we make need to be made with climate change as a lens.” - **Sue AnderBois, Climate & Energy Program Manager, The Nature Conservancy / Community Conversation Participant**

# RI 2030 PRIORITY: ADVANCING INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

Infrastructure and transportation are what allows a modern economy to function and helps us live the lives we want. Goods and people travel on the roads and highways in our buses, cars, and trucks while electricity is generated and distributed to homes and businesses around the state. The clean water we have available keeps us healthy, along with the sewer systems that keep our cities and towns clean and free of disease. Broadband internet allows us to communicate more readily with colleagues, classmates, health care workers, potential employers, and our loved ones. All of these are some of the most important pieces of infrastructure in a modern community. In Rhode Island we also depend on our bridges, airports, and ports to keep us connected to one another and to the rest of the world. As we move deeper into the 21st century, we recognize the importance of decreasing our use of fossil fuels in everything from electricity generation to transportation to heating.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

- Rhode Island—like the rest of the U.S.—has historically underinvested in infrastructure and transportation. As such, the State needs to boost investments in these areas to propel long-term economic growth.
- The state must think broadly about its infrastructure needs—focusing not only on traditional areas like transportation and utilities, but also areas like housing, historic buildings, hospitals, and foundational broadband connectivity.
- There is ample opportunity for regional collaboration in areas like rail, airports, highways, broadband, and offshore wind.
- Improved access to broadband across all of Rhode Island is essential for equitable development.



## CURRENT STATE AGENCY INITIATIVES

Rhode Island must continue to leverage the use of Rhode Works and the ten-year State Transportation Improvement Program to bring our roads and bridges to a state of good repair. Continued collaboration between the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) and the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) will move the State's public transit goals forward by creating more bus routes, streamlined connections, and ease of use. Moreover, Rhode Island recognizes that all Rhode Islanders must have access to the internet.

**RI 2030 INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORTATION GOAL:** By the next decade, Rhode Island will have a state-of-the-art infrastructure and a 21st century transportation system that improves quality of life, connects all Rhode Islanders, integrates Rhode Island with the broader region, and drives economic growth over the long-term.

## INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORTATION OBJECTIVES

Provide well-maintained roads and bridges that are safe, reliable, structurally sound, and meet or exceed current design standards, at both the state and local level.

Have ubiquitous, reliable broadband internet coverage across the state that is affordable and upgradeable to meet the ever-evolving needs of residents and businesses.

A transit system that easily connects workers and employers both within Rhode Island as well as connecting us to the economic hubs of Boston and New York.

Infrastructure that supports the Blue Economy and life sciences, including ports that support offshore wind activity and site readiness work that enables future industrial and commercial development.

- Infrastructure that supports both the mitigation of greenhouse gas use (renewable power generation, modern updated electrical grid, charging stations for electric cars, etc.), as well as the resiliency of the state in the face of climate change.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY AS RHODE ISLAND EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

Infrastructure, including transportation, touches every component of the Rhode Island economy, from workforce development to child care to healthcare. Robust and functional infrastructure provides the foundation for economic growth and allows residents and visitors to access everything the state has to offer. The pandemic also emphasized the need for robust healthcare infrastructure along with the need for modern HVAC systems throughout the state in schools, commercial buildings, and homes.

As many workers moved online and education, healthcare, and everyday communications became increasingly digital, the pandemic underscored the need for reliable internet access across the state. Even before the pandemic, 80% of 8th graders needed the internet to complete their homework, while 90% of job applications were online. At the same time, Rhode Islanders currently face significant inequities in internet access despite the state's robust middle mile. Preliminary speed test data show that 45% of Rhode Islanders live in census blocks that lack access to reliable internet above the new federal minimum threshold. With an eye towards the future, only 2% of Rhode Island reliably receives 200/200mbps speeds, which is necessary to ensure a family of 2-4 can email large files and stream videos concurrently.

There are a number of areas of focus within infrastructure where investments will allow Rhode Island to have a significant positive impact on our vital and connecting systems:

(1) traditional transportation infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, need to be brought to a state of good repair; (2) transit to improve the ability of the state's workers and firms to more fully connect the state to our neighbors, especially Boston; (3) broadband connectivity for the state's residents and businesses; (4) port infrastructure to support the Blue Economy; (5) industrial infrastructure to boost site readiness across the state; and (6) more resilient infrastructure to combat the effects of climate change. This last area is especially important and comes with significant opportunities in renewable electricity generation, storage, and distribution.

## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- With existing transportation and transit plans in place and being operationalized, as well as a strong broadband middle mile, Rhode Island is in a good position to take advantage of federal funding to aid in the state's economic recovery and allow the state to accelerate and enhance ongoing strategic efforts to provide high-speed, affordable broadband and reliable, well-connected transportation options.
- Invest in workforce development and training to make sure construction companies and associated professions have the workers they will need to implement these plans and help people earn credentials that will increase their income.
- Invest in the healthcare infrastructure of hospitals, community health clinics, water and sewer, and broadband access and adoption to help the state be prepared for the next potential public health crisis.

## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (CONT.)

- Continue and increase investment in water, sewer, and stormwater management to ensure a high quality of life and improvement in building healthy, green communities statewide.

## THE ROAD TO RI 2030: LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- Continue to invest in infrastructure needed for offshore wind in pursuit of the State's renewable energy goals and establish a statewide network of charging stations for electrical vehicles.
- Implement the vision outlined in the state Long Range Transportation Plan, including the Rhode Island Transit Master Plan 2040, to better connect Rhode Islanders with each other and neighboring states. Research and pursue the opportunity of high-speed rail connections between Boston, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York.
- Collaborate with municipalities to invest in downtown and Main Street areas to facilitate transit, denser housing, broadband access, and business opportunities.
- Connect more Rhode Islanders with inexpensive, fast, reliable broadband, following recommendations developed through proposed strategic mapping and planning process.
- Build out the State's first ever Infrastructure Data for Effective Action (IDEA) center. Provide FTEs for data management and analysis, working hand in hand with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Division of Information Technology (DOIT), as well as the many agencies who need and utilize infrastructure data. Fund the positions through federal appropriations, grants, state revenue, and public/private partnerships. House this group with staff to the State's single Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Division of Statewide Planning. The development of the IDEA center can position the Governor to actively manage the State's infrastructure portfolio.

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“[T]he transit master plan proposed a set of light rail and bus rapid transit investments that will link the urban core of cities large and small across Rhode Island with each other, with the airport, and into the main stem of the Northeast corridor and the connections to New York and to Boston...A major focus, of course, is going to be on the development of offshore wind facilities at Quonset and other locations across the state, making sure that we have the road and rail access to those locations to make sure that Rhode Island gets its fair share or more than its fair share of the economic impact associated with the offshore wind industry.” - **Bob Yaro, President, North Atlantic Rail Alliance / Community Conversation Participant**

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# RI 2030 PRIORITY: MOVING STATE GOVERNMENT INTO 2030

With the emergence of the global pandemic, the State of Rhode Island faced unprecedented challenges in 2020. As the footprint of remote work activities increased, so did the demand on the core IT network, HR, web and security infrastructure, necessitating an immediate response by the DoIT enterprise IT team and Division of Human Resources. Innovative new platforms needed to be implemented rapidly to increase remote work capacity, improve network performance, enable more online services, and ensure the safety of our both state employees and residents. The State's Division of Information Technology, Division of Purchasing and Division of Human Resources have successfully met the unique challenges of this past year by rapidly deploying solutions to meet needs created by the pandemic and to improve the level of service residents receive.

However, throughout the state, numerous agencies still rely on outdated legacy systems and network architecture. As the world has gone increasingly digital, governments around the country have been some of the last to update both their resident-facing services and internal processes from legacy paper formats. It was not until an executive directive in 2014 that the federal government introduced a requirement for all executive agencies to move to digital recordkeeping. It is now time for the Rhode Island state government to follow that lead and move to update both services for the residents and businesses of Rhode Island as well as internal processes and recordkeeping into the digital world.

Modernizing government services will take thoughtful and careful planning through 2030, and efforts have already begun within the Department of Administration to progress the state towards this goal. There are three main benefits to having the state government go digital.

First, it will allow state agencies to continue to offer more services online, allowing Rhode Islanders easier access to everything from business registration to paying taxes to signing up for unemployment benefits. Rhode Island agencies have already made significant strides in this area and citizens will increasingly expect to interact with government online.

Second, updating the backend government systems, from HR to IT to procurement will increase government efficiency. This will allow state government employees to access benefits online, move purchasing online, and much more, saving time and cost.

Third, digital recordkeeping will open increasing amounts of data that will allow the state and researchers to better evaluate programs to find out what is working, what is not, and suggest changes.