



## **Office of Economic Empowerment**

Rhode Island is in a jobs crisis. For our state to prosper, we need to position ourselves for growth in a 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy. But as we're working towards growing our economy, we must make sure that no one is being left behind in the process. *Our state government plays a major role in ensuring access to opportunity.* We can and will revitalize our economy; but for our state to truly thrive, we must ensure that the playing field is level for all Rhode Islanders, no matter their background, income, or origin.

Too many Rhode Islanders today are living paycheck to paycheck. Nearly 40% of our population qualifies as "liquid asset poor," meaning that they lack enough savings to cover basic expenses for three months in the event of an emergency, such as an unexpected loss of a job.<sup>1</sup> Social mobility is a staple of the American promise, but no one can climb the economic ladder if they are focusing all of their efforts on *just getting by*.

We can change this. We need a state government that is socially conscious, forward-thinking, and fiscally responsible, all at the same time. One of these values is no less important than the other.

***That's why my administration will take a creative, focused approach to ensuring opportunity for all, with a new Office of Economic Empowerment.***

The Office of Economic Empowerment will be an initiative within the governor's office dedicated to ensuring upward social and economic mobility for *all* Rhode Islanders, with a focus on ending poverty and ensuring opportunity. It will reimagine and reinvent the way government addresses seemingly intractable problems, and work with our communities, local non-profits, government agencies, and others to create innovative, evidence-based, and outcome-oriented solutions that break down barriers to opportunity. And it will change the way that our government's human services delivery system works, by breaking down intra- and inter-governmental barriers to ensure that social, health and educational services are delivered effectively and efficiently, with a focus on clearly identified results.

By bringing together expertise, data and passion from government agencies, non-profits, academia and the business community, the Office of Economic Empowerment will play a key role in moving our state forward by challenging traditional approaches and norms and holding itself accountable to real results.

The Office of Economic Empowerment will allow our state government to provide more effective services while *saving money at the same time*. By identifying inefficiencies and

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<sup>1</sup> Assets and Opportunity Scorecard, Rhode Island State Profile.  
<http://www.economicprogressri.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Facts%20and%20Stats/state-profile-RI.pdf>

potential opportunities for collaboration and better delivery of services, the Office will help to maximize the use of state dollars and generate savings over the long term.

The Office will be designed to be flexible. It will work with a variety of groups, pairing our government with social-minded organizations and non-profits to address issues like:

- **Chronic homelessness and the need for affordable housing:** The Office will ensure that our government's affordable housing efforts are working in sync with community organizations to effectively rehouse the homeless, and put families in affordable housing units.
- **Access to higher education:** The Office can develop programs to improve the graduation rate at CCRI, so that our students are earning a degree that will put them on a path to employment.
- **Financial literacy:** The Office can capitalize on the work being done with the Treasurer's office, by fostering relationships with outside groups that are already working in our public schools and local communities.
- **Supporting low-income families:** By working with existing government programs like the Child Care Assistance, SNAP, and Rhode Island Works, the Office will ensure that our low-income families have the support they need to lift themselves out of poverty.

The Office will be focused on *outcomes*. All programs overseen by the Office, including existing government agencies, will undergo rigorous evaluations every year to determine their effectiveness. If the Office is working with a particular group or partner, those organizations will have to demonstrate their benefit in order to continue receiving support or funding from the state.

New York City launched its own "Center for Economic Opportunity" in 2006, and has since launched over 60 programs. Some of the Center's accomplishments include:

- Helping low-income workers and families claim more than \$100 million in tax credits through the local Child Care Tax Credit and increasing claims for the federal Earned Income Tax Credit;
- More than doubling the rate of graduation for CEO program participants at the city's community colleges;
- Securing more than 30,000 job placements and more than 10,000 paid internships for city residents;
- Enrolling over 10,000 people in college or occupational training programs.

***The Office of Economic Empowerment will also be the state's clearinghouse for social innovation initiatives, like social impact bonds and pay-for-success models.***

The field of social innovation is growing rapidly and tackling big problems. With its small size, our state is perfectly poised to become a laboratory for change-makers with ideas for taking on big problems. We've even got a local source of expertise: Brown University is home to a Social Innovation Initiative, where students are developing transformative solutions to global and local problems.

The Social Innovation Initiative describes social innovation as "the pursuit of innovative, transformative, and sustainable solutions to social problems." The Office of Economic Empowerment will actively work with individuals and organizations in the social innovation field to develop and implement strategies for tackling Rhode Island's biggest problems.