

# Papitto Opportunity Connection

May 2025

## Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Sounds The Alarm For RI's Children

The [Rhode Island KIDS COUNT 2025 Factbook](#), published this month, reveals the vital role of federal funding in sustaining crucial programs for Rhode Island's children and families. According to KIDS COUNT Executive Director, Paige Parks, "Potential federal budget cuts could jeopardize access to essential services, impacting everything from food security and healthcare to early education and housing. Investing in kids isn't just the right thing to do —it's a smart, future-focused strategy that benefits the whole state."



Images courtesy of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

Federal funding supports crucial programs for Rhode Island children and families. SNAP benefits nearly 45,000 children, with 70% of households below the poverty line. [RItE Care](#) (Rhode Island's managed health insurance program available to children and families based on family income) covers almost 118,000 children. According to the Factbook, while 78% of children were immunized in 2023, religious exemptions remain a concern, accounting for over 90% of kindergarten and 7th-grade exemptions in the 2024-2025 school year. [Head Start](#) serves 1,438 children, but 493 are on a waiting list. School meal participation is high, with over 35,000 children receiving breakfast and nearly 76,000 participating in school lunch programs daily, though proposed changes to federal eligibility could halve free meal access.



Significant disparities also persist in child well-being, especially among people of color. As of 2020, 47% of Rhode Island children identified as People of Color. The 2025 Factbook notes, poverty rates are notably higher for American Indian and Alaska Native, Hispanic, Black, and multi-racial children compared to Asian/Pacific Islander and White children. Black youth were 11 times more likely to be at the Rhode Island Training School than white youth in 2024, and Latino families have significantly lower median incomes than white families. LGBTQ+ youth also report higher rates of hopelessness and depression.

#### **New Insights from the 2025 Factbook:**

New indicators in this year's Factbook provide deeper insights into Family Structure, Maternal Health, and Infant Health:

- **Maternal Health:** Rhode Island faces a maternal health crisis, with a significant percentage of women delaying prenatal care. Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders cost the state an estimated \$9.7 million annually.
- **Infant Health:** Preterm births and low birthweight contribute to infant mortality, and social determinants like income inequality and racism disproportionately impact maternal and infant health outcomes for Black women and Women of Color.

#### **Additional Challenges:**

- **Homelessness:** In 2024, 479 families with 951 children experienced homelessness, and the number of homeless students identified by public schools increased by 35% since 2021-2022.
- **Mental Health:** Hospitalizations and emergency department visits for mental health conditions among children on Medicaid/RIte Care have increased.
- **Lead Exposure:** Children in Rhode Island's core cities are nearly three times more likely to have elevated blood lead levels.
- **Youth Substance Use:** E-cigarette use among high school students remains a concern.

The report emphasizes the urgent need for sustained federal investment and equitable policies to ensure the well-being and future success of all children and families in Rhode Island.

You can view the complete 2025 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook by clicking [here](#).

## Celebrating Small Business Month & Empowering Entrepreneurs In RI

As National Small Business Month unfolds, we celebrate the vital role these enterprises play in our economy. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, 98% of all businesses in Rhode Island are small businesses. This month, we shine a spotlight on the POC grantees who are dedicated to supporting entrepreneurs, particularly in underserved communities.

The microloan programs offered by the Rhode Island Black Business Association [RIBBA](#), the [Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce](#) (RIHCC), and the [Center for Southeast Asians](#) (CSEA) serve as essential gateways to funding for aspiring and new business owners.

Pictured below from left to right: Lisa Ranglin, President & CEO, RIBBA; Oscar Mejias, Chief Executive Officer, RI Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Channavy Chhay, Executive Director, Center for Southeast Asians.



RIHCC's Building Bankable Business microloan program, launched in collaboration with Papiitto Opportunity Connection (POC) and Navigant Credit Union, has successfully provided over 60 small businesses with access to critical financing. In 2024, RIBBA members benefited from \$165,000 in microloans supported by POC, which drove new job creation, sparked innovation, and stimulated local spending.



Image above: RI Hispanic Chamber members, Navigant Credit Union representatives, and POC Founder Barbara Papitto (striped turquoise jacket).

These programs not only offer crucial capital to entrepreneurs who may struggle to secure traditional loans but also provide the flexibility needed for growth. With loan amounts typically ranging from \$500 to \$5,000, startups and small businesses can easily cover expenses such as inventory, equipment, marketing, and operational costs. Microloan programs also come with personalized guidance and resources, including financial education, mentorship, and business training. Each organization sets its own lending limits and eligibility criteria.

To learn more about how you can benefit from these resources, reach out to RIHCC, RIBBA, or CSEA today.

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## POC June Grant Cycle – Important Updates

Beginning June 1, 2025, POC will be accepting unsolicited grant applications through two specific programs: The *POC Million Dollar Innovation Challenge Grant* and the *POC Small Grant Program*.

The [Million Dollar Innovation Challenge Grant](#) is designed to support programming that will create systemic change for communities most in need in Rhode Island in the areas of education, skills training, business, criminal justice, healthcare, and housing. Organizations applying for this grant are *strongly encouraged* to collaborate with other 501(c)(3) non-profits to leverage resources and cultivate partnerships.



Education



Skills Training



Entrepreneurship

The [Small Grant Program](#) awards are for general operating expenses and awards are generally between \$5,000 and \$20,000. Both grants are competitive programs, and it is important to understand that the fact that a grant application is submitted does not mean that a grant will be awarded. Organizations that have received funding from POC in the past should not count on future funding, as it is not guaranteed.

Importantly, both grant applications have been updated for this grant cycle to provide POC with a more comprehensive understanding of both the strategic and sustainability plans of non-profits applying for funding. All applications must be made through the POC portal between June 1 and June 16, 2025, at 11:59pm.

Those receiving awards will be notified during the third quarter of 2025.

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## **PVD Promise Celebrates Annual Day Of College Savings**

[Providence Promise](#) (PVD Promise) students, families and members of the community recently gathered at Farm Fresh RI for its Annual 529 Day Celebration, hosted in honor of the National Day of College Savings Plans, to raise awareness about the benefits of college savings plans.

PVD Promise certainly had reason to celebrate. Nearly 1,300 students from more than 700 families participated in the program. Families have saved over \$2.4 million for college since PVD Promise was established in 2017.



Pictured above: Youth Engagement Manager, Jaelene Santos, poses with Student Speaker, Ava North, who will be attending University of Maine following 12 college acceptances. Pictured below: students and parents in the hallway of Farm Fresh RI for the 529 Day Celebration.

"PVD Promise celebrated its largest class of graduating seniors to date - more than 50 high school graduates. Of the 31 who have reported their next steps, 100% will be attending a 2 or 4-year university or trade school - a tremendously exciting first for the organization," said Madalyn Ciampi, Executive Director, PVD Promise.

According to its mission, the program "promotes high educational aspirations and more equitable opportunities for Providence Public Schools and Charter School students by advocating for college savings accounts and family engagement, increasing financial literacy, and reducing the financial burden of higher education."



Using [529 College Savings Accounts](#), a robust incentive structure, family and youth engagement services and mentorship services, PVD Promise is transforming how Providence students plan, save, and prepare for education after high school.

## 2025 Transform Rhode Island Scholarship Top 10 Finalists Revealed

Waving a [Transform RI Scholarship Golden Ticket](#), officials representing [Papitto Opportunity Connection](#) recently traveled to high schools across the state, from Central Falls to North Kingstown — and more than a half dozen stops in between.

At each stop, the team surprised students during pep rallies, classroom visits, and assemblies with an exciting announcement: one student from each school had been named a Top 10 finalist for the 2025 Transform RI Scholarship.

For the fourth straight year, POC offered high school students an opportunity to use their voice and be heard by asking for unique ideas on how they would strengthen Rhode Island's communities with the greatest need.



Picture above: Central High School senior Jessiret Peña Gomez receives her golden ticket as a 2025 TRIS top ten finalist.

This year saw a 27% increase in the number of students participating from across the Ocean State. In all, 637 students representing 64 RI public, private, charter, and parochial schools responded, sharing personal essays, thoughtful research, dynamic videos and multimedia presentations showcasing how excited they are about creating real change in their communities.

Addressing food insecurity in schools, launching a job skills education program centered on restoring the Blackstone River and introducing a mobile unit that brings educational and mental health resources to underserved communities, were among the innovative and impactful initiatives that were chosen by a panel of judges for their potential to drive meaningful change in Rhode Island.

**2025 Transform RI Scholarship Top 10 Finalists include:**

Haven Hoenick   Kendra Ramirez   Jace Goldstein   Suhani Srivastava   Safiyatu Gassama

**Congratulations  
Transform RI  
Scholarship Finalists!**

Nachiket Patel   Quadratullah Omari   Jessiret Peña Gomez   Melissa Gonzalez Gutierrez   Rocco DeMartino

**Transform Rhode Island Scholarship**

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- Rocco DeMartino - Cumberland High School
- Haven Hoenick - La Salle Academy (Providence)

- Safiyatu Gassama- Blackstone Valley Prep (Pawtucket)
- Jace Goldstein - Moses Brown School (Bristol)
- Melissa Gonzalez Gutierrez - Cranston High School West
- Quadratullah Omari - The Met High School
- Nachiket Patel - Barrington High School
- Jessiret Peña Gomez- Central High School
- Kendra Ramirez- Central Falls High School
- Suhani Srivastava - North Kingstown High School

The 2025 Transform RI Winner will be revealed during a celebration on May 28. POC will invest \$1 million to make the winning student's big idea become a reality. All TRIS Top 10 finalists will receive scholarships ranging from \$5,000—\$25,000.

Congratulations to all the students!

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