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Economic Progress Institute Welcomes Eight New Members to Board of Directors

PROVIDENCE – The **Economic Progress Institute (EPI)** recently welcomed eight new members to its Board of Directors who bring decades of experience in public policy, nonprofit leadership, healthcare, education, law, financial services, and community advocacy. Their skills, energy, and acumen will support the organization's critical work to advance economic security and opportunity for all Rhode Islanders.

The new board members are: **William J. Allen, Christine Munroe Clapsis, Georgia Gayle, Phanida Phivilay, Jennifer Reynolds, Donna Marie Rook, Ph.D., Ralph Tavares, and Inna Walker.**

"We are thrilled to welcome these eight accomplished leaders to the Economic Progress Institute's Board of Directors," said Weayonnoh Nelson-Davies, EPI's Executive Director. "Each brings valuable expertise, diverse perspectives, and a shared commitment to building a Rhode Island where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. As families across our state continue to face economic challenges, their leadership will help strengthen our work to advance policies that put people first and create the conditions for families to thrive."

Said Linda Shaw, EPI Board Chair, "On behalf of the Economic Progress Institute's Board of Directors, I am delighted to welcome our eight new members. They bring a wealth of knowledge, experience, and perspectives, along with a strong commitment to EPI's mission. We are fortunate to have their leadership as we work together to guide and support EPI's efforts to advance economic progress and equity for all Rhode Islanders."

More on each new board members:



William J. Allen is Senior Fellow at the Watson School for International and Public Affairs at Brown University where he has taught since 2006. With more than 50 years of experience in nonprofit leadership and philanthropy, he previously served as Executive Vice President and Interim President of the United Way of Rhode Island. He has held leadership positions with numerous Rhode Island nonprofit organizations, including Amos House, Children's Friend, and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

"I've long admired the pioneering work of the founders of the Economic Progress Institute, Nancy Gewirtz and Linda Katz, and valued working with them on welfare reform," Allen said "Now under Weayonnoh Nelson-Davies' leadership, EPI is skillfully using power, data, and partnerships to achieve transformative policy change in Rhode Island. For these reasons I welcome the opportunity to serve as a board member of EPI!"



Christine Munroe Clapsis is a government relations and public policy professional with more than a decade of experience in advocacy and consensus building in Washington, D.C. She has also worked in government consulting and the nonprofit education sector. A Rhode Island native, she holds a Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance from George Washington University and a Master of Public Affairs from Brown University's Watson School of International and Public Affairs.

Said Clapsis, "Every child deserves a solid foundation and that starts with families who are economically secure, I am thrilled to be part of EPI's work to make life better for all Rhode Island families."



Georgia Gayle is Director and Head of U.S. Promotional Review & Operations at Alexion, AstraZeneca Rare Disease, with more than a decade of experience in biopharma, healthcare, governance, and strategic operations. She is also a co-founder of the Edna May Morris Foundation, which supports educational opportunities and resources for children and families. A Barrington resident and mother of two, Gayle is deeply invested in advancing economic opportunities and the well-being of Rhode Island families and communities.

"Rhode Island is home for my family, so EPI's mission is deeply personal to me," Gayle said. "Economic security is not an abstract issue - it shapes whether families can access healthcare, afford their basic needs, and create opportunities for the next generation. I am honored to join a Board committed to bringing rigorous research and community voice together to create meaningful change for families across our state."



Phanida Phivilay is the Community Outreach Manager at UnitedHealthcare Community & State Plan in Rhode Island, with more than 29 years of experience in healthcare and community advocacy. Her work focuses on advancing health equity, strengthening community partnerships, and improving access to healthcare for underserved and historically marginalized populations. She made history as the first Southeast Asian woman elected board president of the Center for Southeast Asians and on the Providence School Board. In January 2025, she was appointed to the Johnston

School Committee. Having lived in Rhode Island for more than 46 years after being resettled from Laos at a young age, she brings both lived experience and professional expertise to her work.

"I am honored to join the Economic Progress Institute Board of Directors because I believe everyone deserves the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their circumstances," Phivilay said. "Throughout my career, I have been committed to advancing equity, amplifying the voices of underserved communities, and building partnerships that create meaningful change. I look forward to supporting EPI's work to advance economic justice and improve the well-being of Rhode Island families and working alongside fellow board members to create meaningful opportunities and positive change across Rhode Island."



Jennifer Reynolds is a family law attorney at Barton Gilman LLP, in Providence, where she represents individuals and families in matters involving divorce, child custody, adoption, child support, and other family law issues. A lifelong Rhode Islander, she is actively involved in the Rhode Island Bar Association's Law Related Education programs, visiting local schools to educate students about the legal system. She also supports youth sports through leadership and volunteer roles with the Apponaug Babe Ruth Baseball League and

Warwick Junior Hockey Association.

"Joining the EPI Board provides an avenue to ensure that there are continued policy changes to help those Rhode Islanders who need it most," Reynolds said.



Donna Marie Rook, Ph.D., is the Administrator of Family & Adult Services at the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, with extensive experience in child protective services, behavioral health, housing stabilization, and public assistance programs across Philadelphia, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. Throughout her career, she has championed a comprehensive approach to meeting basic needs, recognizing the connections between food, housing, healthcare, and behavioral health services. She is committed to building programs and partnerships that support families' well-being

and address their needs as early in life as possible. She also serves on the board of Cranston Cares and is a graduate of Leadership Rhode Island's Chi II class.

"I am excited to join the Economic Progress Institute because I am wholeheartedly aligned with their mission of how economic policies affect individuals, families, and communities," said Rook. "My commitment is promoting economic opportunities, reducing poverty, and ensuring that all Rhode Islanders have access to essential resources and services - and EPI is the most impactful organization addressing these concerns. I value the opportunity to contribute to research and advocacy that address real-world challenges and the factors that shape economic inequality."

Ultimately, I want to be part of an organization where I can grow my knowledge, develop valuable skills, and contribute to meaningful change in Rhode Island."



Ralph Tavares is a leader in education, executive search, and organizational inclusion, with more than two decades of experience expanding access for Black and Brown students and professionals as well as to change the systems that decide who gets through the door. He has held leadership positions at Salve Regina University, Providence College, and Roger Williams University School of Law and leads international recruitment efforts across the world. His current work at DSG Global focuses on inclusive executive search and hiring practices.

"I'm honored to be chosen to serve on this board," Tavares said. "The work of the Economic Progress Institute has never been more important than it is right now. We are living in unprecedented times, and the work happening on the ground from this incredible organization is changing lives. As someone who has spent their career opening doorways and providing access, my heart is aligned deeply with its mission."



Inna Walker was born and raised in Southern Ukraine and moved to the United States at the age of 25. Her ties to Ukraine remain strong, with her mother and 102-year-old grandmother still living there. Walker is a financial services professional and community leader with experience spanning banking, business administration, and nonprofit leadership. She has held positions at Bank of America, Santander USA, and Beacon Bank. She currently serves as Treasurer of Hope & Main and is actively involved in Ukrainian-American community organizations, supporting international partnerships, cultural

understanding, and community engagement.

"I've spent years involved in this community, and joining EPI's board is a way to direct that commitment toward the economic challenges facing Rhode Island families," said Walker.

The addition of these eight board members strengthens EPI's leadership as the organization continues to advocate for policies that help Rhode Islanders meet their basic needs, support working families, and build a more equitable and economically secure future.

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The [Economic Progress Institute \(EPI\)](#) is a nonpartisan research and policy organization that fights for social justice and economic equity for all Rhode Islanders. EPI has just published the latest version of its signature research report, the Rhode Island Standard of Need. [Click here to download it.](#) To learn more about EPI, visit economicprogressri.org.

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