

# **An Open Letter to Rhode Island General Assembly Members**

**March 19, 2026**

**Dear Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly,**

Rhode Island is at a breaking point. Across the state, Rhode Islanders are experiencing crisis-level shortages of affordable childcare, housing, and elder care, as well as a shortage of primary care doctors, and one of the highest rates of chronic homelessness in the country. At the same time, Rhode Islanders are also struggling to manage sharp increases in the cost of goods and healthcare, and service cuts to the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA).

We appreciate the steps the Governor and the RI General Assembly have taken to address each of these issues. Unfortunately, for many, simply meeting basic needs has become an impossible challenge. The federal *One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA aka H.R. 1)*, passed on July 4, 2025, will violently strip assistance from 53,000 Rhode Islanders who will lose health insurance and up to 14,000 who are at risk of losing SNAP – all to pay for tax cuts for the wealthiest.

A coalition of 24 Rhode Island policy experts and community organizations came together to assess what's at stake and propose solutions. The findings are clear and alarming: without intervention, OBBBA will cause widespread harm to families, communities, and the systems that sustain them.

## **Call to Action:**

We urge you to advance tax justice and raise all revenue necessary to protect Rhode Islanders from significantly increased food insecurity, homelessness, poverty, racial disparities, uncompensated hospital care, and systemic breakdowns across the healthcare industry.

## **Key Concerns and Risks**

### **1. Healthcare System Collapse**

- **Emergency Room Overload:** Loss of coverage will push uninsured residents into ERs, increasing wait times and costs.
- **Hospital Solvency:** Increased uncompensated care could lead to hospital closures.
- **Rising Costs:** As healthier people forgo insurance, premiums will rise for everyone.
- **Access to Medication:** Uninsured residents will face dangerous gaps in prescriptions, increasing reliance on unsafe alternatives.
- **Healthcare Workforce:** Attacks on immigrant communities could have a significant impact on our healthcare workforce; in 2021, 40% of home health aides in the US were born in foreign countries.
- The state will lose hundreds of millions of dollars a year in federal Medicaid funding.

### **2. Economic and Racial Inequity**

- The harm of OBBBA will fall hardest on immigrant communities and Rhode Islanders of Color, compounding existing disparities in income, housing, and health.
- Some families could simultaneously lose SNAP, Medicaid, Head Start, and Child Tax Credits, all while navigating reduced RIPTA service and heightened fear of deportation.
- Safeguard the personal data and information of public benefits recipients from federal overreach.

- Protect due process rights for immigrants and individuals receiving benefit change notices.

### **3. Food Insecurity**

- Up to 14,000 Rhode Islanders may lose SNAP benefits, and there is an ongoing threat of SNAP benefits being electronically stolen (“skimming”) from beneficiaries as they were in March 2025.
- High SNAP error rates could make the state responsible for up to \$65 million in new cost-sharing.
- Direct service organizations are facing funding shortfalls as demand rises, and may not have capacity to meet community needs – increased food insecurity will worsen health and educational outcomes.

## **Solutions for a Just and Stable Rhode Island**

### **1. Advance Tax Justice and Raise Revenue Equitably**

- Pass a bill to tax the top 1% of income earners (approximately 6,100 tax filers) to generate \$203 million annually. Since 2017 the top 1% have benefitted from federal tax cuts that have now been made permanent and are being paid for by cuts to vital public services.
- RI follows rolling conformity for taxes, which means that federal tax changes automatically become state law unless the state explicitly decouples from them. RI could save at least \$35 million/year (beginning Tax Year 2026) by decoupling from certain Federal tax changes under the OBBBA.
- Create a state Child Tax Credit to reduce poverty and support families.
- Increase the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to put more money in Rhode Islanders’ pockets and make the state more competitive with our neighbors.
- Help family caregivers through a caregiver tax credit program.

### **2. Protect Healthcare Access**

- Fully fund a new system to deliver healthcare for those losing coverage, particularly immigrants. This could include increased funding for uncompensated care, revising charity care laws and/or creating a state-run pharmacy for life-saving medications.
- Establish a state subsidy to replace federal enhanced premium tax credits that expired for 46,000 residents who purchase coverage through HealthSourceRI at the end of 2025. Without those subsidies, premiums have doubled, on average.
- Prevent the spread of scam insurance plans and expand support for medically assisted addiction treatment programs to avoid life-threatening disruptions in care.

### **3. Ensure Food and Basic Needs Security**

- Increase investment in SNAP, the Rhode Island Food Bank, and local direct service organizations providing essential aid.
- Prevent ongoing electronic theft (“skimming”) of SNAP benefits by upgrading EBT cards with tap/chip technology; fully reimburse the \$750,000+ in SNAP benefits stolen from Rhode Islanders in 2025.

- Provide a cost-of-living increase for RI Works recipients and restore the cost of living for those receiving the RI SSI supplement.

#### **4. Strengthen State Capacity and Community Partnership**

- Increase DHS staffing to manage changes, answer public questions, and reduce administrative errors.
- Ensure public communication provides adequate notice that is timely, clear, and culturally appropriate by partnering with schools, churches, libraries, HEZ groups, small businesses, and trusted community organizations.
- Fund local community-based organizations to help residents navigate benefit systems.
- Expand workforce development, adult education, and volunteer programs to meet work requirement needs.
- Reverse service cuts and fully fund RIPTA, which thousands of SNAP and Medicaid recipients rely on for access to work, healthcare, and food.
- Collaborate with neighboring states on OBBBA implementation to share data and strategies that minimize harm.

The path forward requires bold action and thoughtful investment, not cuts. We call on you to protect Rhode Islanders and stand ready to work with you to ensure Rhode Island does not descend into a state of emergency from which it could take decades to recover.

Sincerely,

**ACLU of RI**

**Alliance of RI Southeast Asians (ARISE)**

**Alliance to Mobilize Our Resistance (AMOR)**

**Commission for Health Advocacy and Equity CHAE**

**Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE)**

**Economic Progress Institute**

**Housing Network of Rhode Island**

**Immigrant Coalition of Rhode Island**

**Latino Policy Institute**

**Progreso Latino**

**RI AFL-CIO**

**RI Center for Justice**

**RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

**RI Council of Churches**

**RI Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty**

**RI KIDS COUNT**

**RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN)**

**SEIU State Council**

**Senior Agenda Coalition of RI**

**SISTA Fire**

**Women’s Fund of Rhode Island**

**Womxn Project**