

Testimony in Support of H7771, H7769, and H7770  
An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Minimum Wage Increase  
House Committee on Labor  
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**The Economic Progress Institute strongly supports Representative Sanchez’s HB7771**, which would increase the minimum wage in Rhode Island to a living wage of \$24/hour starting in 2027. **We also support Representative Furtado’s H7769**, which would increase the minimum wage to \$20 starting in 2027. **Finally, we support Representative Bennett’s H7770**, which would tie the minimum wage to a consumer price index (CPI) starting in 2029; however, it is imperative that the minimum wage be equal to a living wage (\$24/hour in 2026) before it gets tied to a CPI.

Rhode Islanders value hard work and fairness, and we deserve to earn a living wage. Unfortunately, too many hardworking Rhode Islanders with full-time employment cannot afford to meet their basic needs. The minimum wage in RI is currently \$16.00/hour, yet EPI’s report, the 2024 Rhode Island Standard of Need (RISN), shows that in 2024, a single adult working full-time needed to earn \$23.46 per hour to cover their basic needs. According to MIT’s living wage calculator, the living wage in Rhode Island is currently \$25.01 per hour.<sup>1</sup> The gap between the current minimum wage and the actual living wage explains why so many Rhode Islanders are struggling to meet their basic needs: 78% of single parents with two children cannot meet their basic needs without assistance, and 68% of single adults without children cannot meet their basic needs without assistance. When you break down these numbers by race, ethnicity, and gender, the percentages are worse.<sup>2</sup>

Although the General Assembly has laudably taken steps to increase the minimum wage in Rhode Island in recent years, these increases were insufficient to keep pace with the rising cost of food and rent. In 2024, Providence was ranked the least affordable metropolitan city for renters in the country.<sup>3</sup> In the Northeast Region, food prices rose by 3.7% in the last year and Rhode Islanders are really feeling the impact of this.<sup>4</sup> According to the annual RI Life Index survey, 44% of respondents said they experienced some level of household food insecurity in the last year.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Living Wage Calculation for Rhode Island – MIT](#)

<sup>2</sup> [2024 Rhode Island Standard of Need – Economic Progress Institute](#)

<sup>3</sup> [2025 Redfin Report on Rent Affordability](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Consumer Price Index, Northeast Region \(February 2026\) - US Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Rhode Islanders Report Challenges With Cost of Living, Access to Affordable Housing, and Nutritious Food – News from Brown \(February, 2026\)](#)

Rhode Islanders working full-time should be able to meet their basic needs. Increasing the minimum wage directly helps working people afford housing, food, healthcare, and other basic necessities. **Increasing the minimum wage would also improve the economy and equity** in the state, because women and people of color tend to disproportionately work in minimum wage essential jobs, such as childcare, elder care, and retail. Rhode Island has been experiencing what has been described as workforce crises in areas of child care and elder care, but these crises can more aptly be called a workforce exodus; childcare and eldercare employees are choosing to leave these fields because these essential jobs do not pay enough for these essential workers to take care of themselves or their families. Without these workers, our economy cannot function.

We need a minimum wage that enables all Rhode Islanders to have an opportunity to thrive. Establishing a \$24 minimum wage by 2027 will help ensure that Rhode Islanders are able to provide for themselves. If not \$24/hour, a \$20 minimum wage would still make a significant difference for working Rhode Islanders. By attaching the minimum wage to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in 2029, neither Rhode Island workers nor members of the General Assembly will have to worry about future wage stagnation and exploitation. **The Economic Progress Institute strongly urges the passage of H7771, H7769, and H7770.**