

LATINO IMPACT PLAN

ADDRESSING INEQUITIES AND
BARRIERS OF THE LATINO COMMUNITY
IN RHODE ISLAND THROUGH THE
COVID-19 CRISIS

LATINO
POLICY INSTITUTE

— Research | Advocacy | Education —

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic placed a magnifying glass on the countless ways in which society has failed to protect the health, safety, and security of many underserved individuals, especially among Black and Latino communities. In mid-April 2020, the Rhode Island Department of Health announced that Latinos made up 45% of infections, while only being 16% of the overall state population. Cities across the country like New Orleans and New York had begun to see a similar infection trend among their Black and Latino communities. The alarming rate caused health professionals, community leaders, and state officials to uncover the variety of reasons why numbers among this specific community were disproportionately high.

Community leaders and health professionals pointed to issues around housing, healthcare access, and economic barriers as some of the underlying reasons for the disproportionate number of infections among cities with large Latino populations. However, the virus did not only affect the health of communities, in fact, it brought about issues around economic security, inequities in education, as well as social and emotional stress. The Latino Impact Plan outlines the unique barriers and opportunities that exist within the Latino community – during and prior to COVID-19 - around economic equity, health, and education.

Economic Equity

Families and businesses struggle to make ends meet –

In the last decade, the Latino workforce has grown by 40% and by 2040 Latinos are expected to be nearly 24% of the total Rhode Island workforce. At the same time, historically Latinos have been overrepresented in the unemployment rate compared to their white counterparts. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, Rhode Island is facing its highest unemployment rate in history reaching a high of 18% in the spring of 2020. Employment and wage loss has caused thousands to struggle to afford their rent and mortgage. In Rhode Island, over 70% of renters are Latino and 28% are homeowners. Many renters and homeowners, who were already cost burdened, struggled to make payments due to wage or employment loss. While courts closed for the first half of the year for eviction proceedings, in July 2020 courts began opening once more and evictions resumed.

Small businesses, especially Black and Latino owned, felt the financial impact of COVID-19 in many ways. A poll conducted by Global Strategy Group in May 2020 showed that only 12% of Black and Latino owned small businesses received federal Paycheck Protection Program loans. Additionally, according to a report from the National Bureau of Economic Research, in June 2020, 41% of Black-owned and 32% of Latino-owned businesses were forced to close.

Health

Lack of access to health care and insurance –

In recent years, Rhode Island boasted about the “strides” made towards health insurance coverage for all Rhode Islanders by reaching an uninsured rate of 6%. However, what this number does not tell us is that the uninsured rate in the Latino community is actually over 24%. During the COVID-19 crisis, Rhode Island expanded the Emergency Medicare program to cover individuals who are uninsured and may require testing and hospitalization. However, many of these individuals –including children- may lack any further access to necessary and basic health care.

Education

Supporting students and families around educational equity supports –

Rhode Island has been struggling with systemic inequities in education for decades; from a funding formula, that disproportionately affects communities of color, to racist and discriminatory practices in pedagogy. However, the crisis further highlighted the ways in which the existing inequities disproportionately affected low-income communities and communities of color through lack of technological resources and funding cuts to districts within cities impacted by COVID-19.

As the country continues to deal with the insurmountable impacts of COVID-19, Rhode Island must take bold action steps to implement inclusive and systemic solutions to serve impacted communities. The Impact Plan outlines short term and long-term recommendations for municipal and state leaders. The recommendations highlight important social and financial investments that the state must create to address the current and future needs of Latinos and other underserved communities in Rhode Island.

Recommendations Summary

- Strengthen Workers Protections – Regardless of legal status and place of work, employees must have access to safe working conditions. Additionally, Paid Sick Leave should be expanded and available to all workers regardless of employer size.
- Continuous Injection of Capital for all Small businesses – The needs of small businesses varies by industry, which is why it is imperative that government programs understand the different methods of support needed. Small businesses, especially minority owned businesses, that did not qualify for federal loan programs should be prioritized within local and state government programs.
- Rent and Mortgage Assistance – Funds and resources for housing assistance will be necessary for many months to come. Municipalities must invest in necessary funding and programming to assist their hardest hit communities. Additionally, the state government must strongly consider placing an eviction moratorium for at least three months after the State of Emergency ban is lifted.
- Health Care Coverage for all children – Every child in our state, regardless of immigration status, should be eligible for health coverage. This is especially important as children return to school in the fall of 2020.
- Equitable Funding for Distressed School Districts – Many school districts such as Woonsocket, Pawtucket, Providence and Central Falls will enter the 2020-2021 school year with less state funding. We cannot expect many of our poorest districts to serve our students with fewer resources and less support during a global pandemic.
- Generating New Revenue – Legislation introduced in 2020 would add a new tax bracket for the top 1% of earners (from 5.99% to 8.99%) on adjusted gross income above \$475,000. The passage of this legislation would generate an estimated \$128.2 million in new revenue, which could fund education and other social services.
- Inclusive Statewide Communications and Engagement – During the COVID-19 crisis, the state and many municipalities struggled to provide needed information to communities in the appropriate languages. This caused confusion and an additional sense of isolation. Rhode Island must commit to creating and sustaining meaningful and equitable partnerships with community organizations and members, not just during emergencies but rather on a regular basis.

ECONOMIC EQUITY

The devastating impacts of COVID-19 on our national and local economy have been deeply harmful. An already fragile economic climate for most came crashing down in a matter of weeks and experts warn us that things may only get worse. Similar to the 2007 Great Recession, communities of color and low-income communities will see a deeper and longer impact for decades to come. In Rhode Island, we have already begun to see the effects of job and wage loss, small businesses who are struggling to survive, and social supports that are on the verge of being gutted

UNEMPLOYMENT & EMPLOYMENT PROTECTIONS

During the last decade, the Latino workforce has grown by nearly 40% (from 8.4% to 11.6%) and by 2040, that number is expected to be nearly 24% of Rhode Island's workforce. At the same time, Latinos have been disproportionately represented in the unemployment rate compared to their white counterparts. During the Great Recession, the Latino unemployment rate was over 20% and it lingered at this rate until late 2013. In June 2019, while the national unemployment rate was below 4%, Latinos faced an unemployment rate of nearly 5%. Today, Rhode Island is facing its highest unemployment rate in history, and while we do not yet have specific data about Latinos, it is safe to assume that they will face a much higher unemployment rate than their white counterparts due to our experience during the Great Recession. In fact, in May 2020, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 61% of Latino respondents have faced job or wage loss compared to 38% of their white counterparts.

The lack of support and protections around employment retaliation and paid sick leave have disproportionately affected communities of color during this pandemic. Although Rhode Island employees can accrue sick time, not all can utilize this protection while being paid if they work in a small company. This leads to a large number of employees—most of them of color—not taking the necessary time off due to the financial burden.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Encouraging & Expanding WorkShare:** During 2020, several municipal and state agencies have resorted to using the WorkShare program to help prevent layoffs and steer the economy towards recovery. In the state and municipal level, the use of WorkShare is set to save them millions of dollars. While the program is also available to other employers, as of June 30, 2020 only 230 employers have been using it according to the Department of Labor and Training. It is safe to assume that many employers, especially small minority owned businesses, may not be familiar with the WorkShare program. Which is why it is imperative that as state and municipal agencies continue to make use of the program they also share with other employers and organizations some of their best practices and most importantly, as much information as to how the program works and affects their business. Additionally, WorkShare should be expanded to include temporary and intermittent employees who are currently ineligible to participate.

- **Expand Paid Sick Leave:** Black and Latino workers are overrepresented in lower-wage sectors such as transportation, warehousing and home health care. These sectors are marked by a higher prevalence of independent contracting, leaving many workers ineligible for Rhode Island's statutory paid sick leave. Employees ineligible for paid sick leave in Rhode Island include any individual employed in domestic work or home health, both of which are frontline essential work. Rhode Island law allows for only 40 hours of paid sick time for employers with 18 or more employees. Paid sick time should be available to all workers regardless of employer size. Sick time should be available to any sick worker or any worker caring for a sick family member. Rhode Island should provide increased financial assistance to small businesses to cover these costs if they are not covered under the federal stimulus.
- **Strengthen Worker's Protections:** Although the Center for Disease Control has released workplace safety guidelines for the protection of workers during the COVID-19 emergency, these guidelines are not a part of enforceable OSHA requirements. In spite of the status of guidelines as compared to requirements, workers can file complaints with OSHA for unsafe conditions at work and these complaints must be accepted without regard to immigration status. Immigrant workers need not provide their identity to file such a complaint. An individual or a group of workers with common concerns can ask a third party such as a lawyer or advocate to file the complaint on their behalf.
- **Provide Easier Access to Filing Claims Against Employers:** Efforts are needed to increase knowledge of workers' rights, addressing language barriers that those who are discriminated against or retaliated against at work now face, increase the speed, volume and efficacy of investigations of employers, and make filing claims more accessible.

SMALL BUSINESSES

The world was paused at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. States across the nation enacted stay at home orders causing businesses across the spectrum to transition to remote work or for many, close their doors temporarily. This closure hit corporate chains hard, but also small businesses such as hospitality, retail, hair salons, spas, home improvement, and contractors even harder. Of the 30 million small businesses in the U.S, 7.5 million may be at risk for permanent closure in the coming months. Businesses with less than 20 employees struggle with the lack of cash flow and capital to keep their business afloat. In turn, with these closures we face another yet another crisis, the more than 35.7 million Americans at risk of unemployment.

Not only is it difficult to maintain and keep afloat a small business during a global pandemic, the struggle began much earlier. In the U.S, minority owned businesses make up 1.1 million of all businesses, employing more than 8.7 million and annually generating more than \$1 trillion into the economy. According to the Stanford School of Business, large banks approve 60% of loans compared to White owners, 50% of loans by Latino owners and 29% of Black small business owners. The Small Business Administration 2018 Small Business Profile shows there are nearly 15,000 minority-owned businesses in the state of Rhode Island. Most of these small businesses are not backed by large federally protected banks or loan servicers, and rely on small individual loans from smaller loan servicers.

With the federal CARES Act passed by Congress in April, Latino business owners once again were at a disadvantage since many, if not most, were not connected to large financial institutions. As of late April, 31% of Latino business owners who applied for aid had been approved compared to 55% of their White counterparts.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Injection of Capital:** The first and foremost issue is the need for an injection of capital to small businesses. While the Paycheck Protection Program aimed to prevent small businesses and organizations from having to lay off staff, many businesses instead need unrestrained funding for other necessities such as rent and purchase of basic goods. When providing financial aid, the Federal and State government must address the needs of businesses in different industries on a case-by-case basis. While small technology companies may benefit from funding to cover staff costs, restaurants will need to use such funds for the purchase of food, which is their biggest expense. In order to address the current and potential crisis of small businesses, government must acknowledge that different industries will need varied support methods in the short and long term.
- **Meaningful Connection & Partnership with Small Businesses:** During early months of 2020, Rhode Island leaders and municipalities deployed different tactics and approaches to connect and inform small businesses. However, the issue with is that for many businesses this was the first time that they had ever heard from state or municipal agencies. According to the Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, prior to COVID-19, Latino small business owners in different municipalities had expressed their frustration and disillusion over the lack of connection they have had with local government. During this pandemic, for the first time, Rhode Island Commerce ensured that all materials were provided in Spanish. However, small business owners that do not speak Spanish or English have been left out. State and municipal agencies must acknowledge that providing information to local businesses must be done in a culturally and linguistically responsible manner and done frequently.

Decisions about investments for small businesses should be made with representatives from different sectors, geographic areas and ethnic and racial backgrounds. To do so, the state and municipal agencies must invest in the creation and sustainability of local business associations and leaders to support business owners especially within culturally diverse areas. If this is done and sustained thoughtfully it will be easier to access, inform, and help small businesses across the state year round and not just during emergencies.

- **Improving Collection and Sharing of Data for Businesses:** State and municipal agencies that work to promote economic and workforce development need to increase their knowledge of Latino businesses to properly understand the unique needs of these businesses compared to other industries. We need to identify these businesses by sector to meet their needs. This includes sharing, and in some cases creating, data that is currently not available about small local businesses broken down by gender, age, type of industry, race and ethnicity and municipality. This data should be available within a centralized system that provides as much up to date information as possible. This information is key to knowing exactly who and what supports are needed, rather than blindly creating programs that only benefit a small percentage of business owners.

- **Resources for Undocumented Business Owners:** It is imperative that any State funds, both today and in the future, provided to local business owners are also available to undocumented business owners. Undocumented business owners, like other minority owned businesses, have not been able to obtain any federal funds to supplement their decreasing or non-existent income. In order to ensure that the economic and social benefits of these businesses persist, the state must guarantee that they will be eligible for all funds that other businesses can receive.

SUPPORT FOR RENTERS, LANDLORDS & PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

The loss of wages and employment among thousands of Rhode Islanders has led to increased housing insecurity, especially among already vulnerable communities. According to HomesRI, “since March, over 170,000 Rhode Islanders have filed for unemployment insurance and thousands have reported being unable to pay rent for April and May. Rhode Island’s housing finance agency has received thousands of calls each week from homeowners in need of assistance. Without additional financial relief, more Rhode Islanders will be at risk of housing insecurity and homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Rent and Mortgage Assistance:** People who have lost income because of the pandemic will struggle to pay large sums of back-rent and mortgage deferrals as they accumulate unless there is a sustainable way to address it. It is important that the state and municipalities use any funds and resources available to assist those who have fallen behind on rental or mortgage payments as a result of COVID-19 regardless of citizenship or immigration status. Additionally, housing assistance payments should continue for 90 days following government officials’ authorization to return to work. Rental assistance can also be used to support landlords and long-term affordable housing providers to continue operating as they face losses in income due to COVID-19.
- **Eviction Diversion Court:** The establishment of an Eviction Diversion Court within the District Court calendar is designed to provide landlords and tenants the opportunity to work together to sustain tenancies impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. An approach that combines rental assistance and court- ordered mediation, and access to legal counsel for tenants, is most likely to keep Rhode Islanders in their homes. The Eviction Diversion Court will deploy these critical tools to assist landlords and tenants to arrive at payment plans and restructure rental arrearages. The successful implementation and sustainability of this court can be an impactful and important addition to our state’s housing practices.
- **Supports for People Experiencing Homelessness:** People experiencing homelessness are at high risk of contracting COVID-19 and more likely to need critical care and emergency services than those with housing access. New projections indicate that nearly 800 people experiencing homelessness in Rhode Island will require emergency accommodations. To support safe “sheltering in place” for Rhode Islanders experiencing homelessness, the state should utilize available resources to provide emergency hotel/motel vouchers for homeless individuals who test positive and/or are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.

SUPPORTS FOR UNDOCUMENTED INDIVIDUALS AND MIXED STATUS FAMILIES

For millions of undocumented immigrants across the country, COVID-19 has presented yet another threat to their livelihood, health, and safety. Not only does our country depend on undocumented immigrants to work in the service and production sectors, but it also depends on their taxes. In Rhode Island, in 2018 over 29,000 undocumented immigrants contributed \$31 million to the local economy. Yet, each of these individuals and their families (many of whom may have legal status) were excluded from the Federal stimulus checks provided in April 2020. For many undocumented individuals and families facing wage or employment loss, the consequences can be dire in the long term. Ensuring that the state and municipal government is prepared to offer financial and social supports to undocumented individuals and their families will be a major priority for the several years.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Access to State Relief Funds Regardless of Immigration Status:** States like California, New York and Illinois have led by example by passing legislation to provide financial relief to undocumented workers, individual and families who were not eligible for the federal stimulus funding due to their legal status. Rhode Island can and should follow their lead and ensure that any programs that are established using the Coronavirus Relief Fund be available to all Rhode Islanders, regardless of immigration status. Individuals or businesses applying for assistance under these programs should not be asked about citizenship or immigration status. Other wage supports that Rhode Island can provide to our immigrant community is access to workers' compensation, State Disability Insurance, and state Paid Family Leave benefits as California has recently done.

HEALTH

When COVID-19 first reached the United States, health experts focused on the known impact that the virus had on those with preexisting conditions and those who were 65 years or older. Later on we began to see that Black and Latino communities were being infected and dying at disproportionate rates compared to Whites. These communities have been historically impacted by poor health outcomes and chronic conditions primarily due to the systemic disinvestment in these social and physical environments. For decades, public health experts have been highlighting and calling out the importance of addressing social determinants of health, which include economic stability, education, social, and community context, health and health care and neighborhood environment. While work has been started in Rhode Island to address some of these inequities through policy and practice, with the current pandemic, it is clear there is still a lot of work to be done.

FINANCIAL BURDEN FOR PERSONS WHO ARE UNINSURED AND UNDERINSURED

Recently, Rhode Island boasted about the “strides” made towards health insurance coverage for all Rhode Islanders by reaching an uninsured rate of 6%. However, what this number does not tell us is that the uninsured rate in the Latino community is actually over 24%. Additionally, Latinos are more likely to experience barriers accessing a doctor due to financial burden. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a prime example of what happens when thousands of Latinos do not have access to health insurance or a primary care doctor.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Expand Emergency Medicare for People who are Uninsured and Underinsured:** While the state has expanded its Emergency Medicare program to cover individuals who are uninsured and may require testing and hospitalization, our state must go further to ensure that those who are underinsured have access to medical treatment for health issues related to COVID-19. Further, because we do not yet know what the long-term effects of COVID-19 are on a person’s body, it is important that the state commit to providing outpatient treatment and other COVID-19 related treatment in the future to all those impacted, regardless of immigration status or access to health insurance.
- **Provide Health Coverage to All Children, Regardless of Status:** In 2001, Rhode Island provided health coverage to all children regardless of their immigration status. In 2008, Rhode Island stopped providing coverage to all children. Since then, thousands of children in our state have been denied basic health care access. Today, six states (California, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, and Washington) and the District of Columbia (D.C.) use state-only funds to cover Medicaid/CHIP income-eligible children regardless of immigration status. Guaranteeing that every child has access to basic health coverage is a public safety concern that must be addressed by our state and federal government.

PREPARING FOR SECOND WAVE & INOCULATION

With states slowly reopening, people going back to work and life returning to some sense of normalcy, we must continue to be reminded that the epidemic is far from over. In fact, with thousands of people still testing positive and dying throughout the country, we must ensure that our state remains prepared for the worse. Our state and municipal government will need to utilize the upcoming weeks or months of respite to plan for a potential and critical second wave of the virus, while also preparing to dispatch the necessary resources and information when a vaccine is available.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Municipal Wraparound support:** The cities of Central Falls and Pawtucket have been deeply impacted by the virus. In response, they have created life-saving wraparound supports for their residents, which include accessible testing, direct connection with a doctor, language-appropriate communication, and family outreach. For thousands of individuals in each of these cities, having access to a primary care physician was not common practice due to access and affordability barriers. The cities also recruited multilingual volunteers from local nonprofits and businesses to serve as family outreach support coordinators. In this role, volunteers provided residents with information about how to isolate properly and where to find other resources needed. These efforts are an important example of why municipal leadership must continuously invest in meaningful connections and collaborations with local businesses and organizations.

This model should be recreated in other cities and towns as we prepare for a potential second wave of the pandemic. Additionally, our state and federal government must make investments in community supports that engage municipalities, nonprofit organizations, and local businesses. Without financial support, efforts like that of Central Falls and Pawtucket will not be viable for much longer.

- **Expand and encourage testing:** Our state's testing capacity has expanded exponentially as compared to what was available in early March 2020. However, as communities slowly move towards reopening, it will be necessary to provide and encourage testing, especially in communities like Central Falls and Providence that have seen the largest infection rates. As we implement reopening plans for businesses and schools, it is imperative that individuals are informed about the availability of free and secure testing. Without this, we will once again put vulnerable communities at great risk of infection and death. Additionally, it will be imperative for our state to continue to support testing sites that are accessible to community members who may not have a car or health insurance, as well as those who lack legal immigration status.
- **Increase Isolation Supports for All:** For many individuals, isolating at home is nearly impossible because, in many communities, and especially immigrant communities, people tend to live in larger groups. Our state and many others provided first responders and other front line workers access to hotels or other living quarters in an effort to isolate them from their loved ones. Communities like Central Falls, Providence, and Pawtucket also need to have access to spaces to isolate residents that cannot isolate at home. Our state must prioritize the access of residents from highly condensed and vulnerable communities to hotels or living quarters when they need to isolate, otherwise we will once again see a large spike of families infected by the virus.

- **Vaccination Access:** While we do not yet know when a vaccine may be ready for distribution, our state and local government should begin to draft a plan for how the vaccine will be distributed. As we have learned during the first half of this year, communities of color and other vulnerable groups are at higher risk of infection and death by the virus. Due to the lack of appropriate communication and outreach, many vulnerable individuals and families did not have enough access to health, social, or financial supports. These lessons must guide how our state and municipal government lead the way when vaccination is available. Finally, it will be imperative that access to vaccines is open to all individuals regardless of immigration status or ability to pay.

ESTABLISHING SUPPORTS FOR THE MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, some of the most common mental health disorders among Latinos include, “anxiety disorder, major depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and alcoholism.” While Latinos display a similar susceptibility to mental illness as other communities, they are less likely to receive the necessary care and treatment. In fact, only 20% of Latinos who experience symptoms of a psychological disorder talk to a doctor about their symptoms, and only 10% contact a mental health professional. During this pandemic, Americans are experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety at a rate well above historical norms. Cultural stigma and economic barriers to treatment for mental health issues or mental illness among the Latino community has long been detrimental to overall health. Today, more than ever, lack of treatment for mental health issues and mental illness presents a long-term risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Develop Fund to Address Mental Healthcare needs of Latino Community:** In a collaborative effort, the state and municipal governments should work to allocate funding for culturally-appropriate, intensive mental health programs specifically targeted to communities of color. These services must be available to individuals regardless of immigration status or access to health insurance.

EDUCATION

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, our state was already struggling to deal with systemic inequities in our education system, specifically related to an inequitable funding formula that disproportionately impacts communities of color, as well as racist and discriminatory practices in pedagogy. However, this crisis has further highlighted the ways in which the existing inequities disproportionately impacted low-income communities and communities of color. Students and families from underfunded districts had to grapple with the lack of technology access or knowledge; other school districts did not experience such a challenge. Families were faced with the responsibility of mediating or leading their child's educational journey during the last half of the year. Many teachers and administrators struggled with the few resources they were provided, while also reaching those children whose families do not have access to technology.

INVESTING IN IMPACTED SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Earlier this year, a Special Legislative Task Force in the Senate found, among other things, that the school districts in Woonsocket, Pawtucket and Providence did not meet the “core minimum per-pupil amount” of school funding advocates and experts have been highlighting this issue for many decades as one of the underlying issues for educational inequities in our urban core. With the current health and financial crisis facing our state and nation, it is imperative that we address the lack of funding support for our districts. After the Great Recession, many states have been chronically divesting from education. These cuts have impacted resources for students and teachers and has had a significant effect on student opportunities to learn and thrive.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Change the Funding Formula to Create Increased and More Equitable Funding for Schools:** Today more than ever, our state must acknowledge the importance of equitable funding in our school districts. Rhode Island must make meaningful investments in districts that have been disproportionately affected by chronically low funding and the current health crisis. We cannot expect many of our poorest districts, such as Woonsocket, Pawtucket, Providence and Central Falls, to serve our students with fewer resources and less support. The investments we make today in our schools will benefit our state economy in the future.
- **Equitably Address the Reopening of Schools:** Since March 2020, students and teachers have shifted their classrooms to virtual platforms. Moving to a virtual classroom has created hurdles for many as they navigated a new way of life and learning. With the current school year ending, we now have an opportunity to anticipate and address any challenges that the fall semester may bring us. However, our state and school districts must understand that reopening plans cannot be a “one size fits all” model. While the RI Department of Education and Department of Health have provided important guidelines and flexibility to districts, many other aspects of support need to be addressed, such as food insecurity, housing access, and financial supports for families. During the reopening planning and implementation process, the state and districts must take into account that different communities will have different financial, social, and cultural barriers. Students and parents must be part of the decision making.

LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations highlight important social and financial investments that the state must create to address the future gaps and needs of Latinos and other underserved communities in Rhode Island. Most of these investments will require bold legislative and budgetary changes at a state and federal, however, as we have seen with this pandemic: we must not continue the status quo.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY

Statewide Community Communications & Engagement: According to the latest Census data, the top seven languages spoken in Rhode Island are English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Haitian Creole, Chinese, and Khmer. Nevertheless, the state government continues to struggle to communicate, engage and inform all Rhode Islanders in an appropriate cultural and linguistic manner. During the COVID-19 crisis some municipalities stepped up and ensured that all information was translated at least in Spanish and Creole (specifically in Pawtucket and Central Falls) however, it took State agencies much longer to begin sharing the necessary information in other languages. In a state with such rich, involved and vibrant community organizations we must ensure that state and municipal agencies are not only utilizing and compensating these organizations as resources, but most importantly: leverage their direct connections with the community to help inform decisions and spread information.

In an era where every part of life seems to depend on social media, we must remember that many Rhode Islanders do not have the access to these platforms. Depending solely on the transmission of information to non-English speaking communities through social media or online platforms is wrong and it dismisses the reality of thousands of Rhode Islanders. Rhode Island must step up to address this important issue by:

- Hiring staff across all Offices and Departments (at all levels, not only administrative) that are representative of the different communities, races, ethnicities, and languages that are spoken in Rhode Island;
- Provide culturally responsive training for all municipal and state employees and elected officials;
- Develop working relationships with community-based organizations that are trusted messengers for different communities in the state and compensate them appropriately for helping to translate, frame and communicate information;
- Any resources created and shared by the state in multiple languages should be shared with municipalities that may lack the financial capacity to compensate local community organizations.

As a state, we must acknowledge and elevate the power of diverse communities. We must commit to creating and sustaining meaningful and equitable partnerships with community organizations and members, not just during emergencies, but also on a daily basis.

Community Public Health: In early May 2020, Doctor Alexander Scott underscored the impact of social, racial and economic determinants of health in the effects of COVID-19 in the nation and state. As public health experts have been saying for years, society needs to address the social determinants such as housing, safety, economic opportunity, and even trauma and racism in order to improve community health. This pandemic must be a wake up call for government to answer the countless pleas to take bold action to address the needs for safe and healthy housing, access to healthcare for all, equitable education, and dismantling for deeply rooted racist systems.

Accessible Accurate Data: Throughout this report, we have made an effort to highlight as much local specific data as possible for areas around unemployment, small businesses, education, health and housing. Nevertheless, we found that in many instances there was very little data or information available that specifically highlighted the impact or numbers of Latinos or other communities of color. It is imperative that all state and municipal agencies make a conscious decision and effort to ensure that all data collected and shared contains ethnic and racial data. While there are rational reasons to keep some private information out of statistical analysis, there are also important reasons to outline how specific programs or issues are impacting communities differently.

FINANCIAL STABILITY & RESILIENCY

Generating New Revenue: To address the current and future financial crisis in our state, government officials will need to take bold action to create stable and equitable revenue in the years to come. As proposed by the Revenue for RI campaign in 2020, adding a new tax bracket for the top 1% of earners (from 5.99% to 8.99%) on adjusted gross income above \$475,000 would generate an estimated \$128.2 million in new revenues. These funds will be needed to fund the human rights, such as access to excellent public education and health care, and to increase support for local cities and towns.

RI Works Investments: The RI Works Program provides a minimal cash benefit (\$554/month for a family of 3) and is the primary “workforce development” door for parents as they work to gain fundamental skills. Over 31% of program recipients are Latino, and over 80% are women. The financial benefit and workforce preparation opportunities of this program are meant to support families as they move toward gaining employment that provides family sustaining wages, however, Rhode Island has failed to increase the benefit to meet the needs of inflation. By increasing the cash benefit of this program, the state will be better prepared for any current and future financial crisis.

Creating and Sustaining an Emergency Community Fund: The current health and financial crisis has impacted individuals and families who were already vulnerable, such as undocumented Rhode Islanders who were excluded from receiving federal stimulus funds and other resources. By creating and sustaining a community fund that can provide financial resources to vulnerable communities, businesses and organizations - regardless of immigration status - during times of need, we will mitigate the social and economic impact within vulnerable communities. This fund should be developed and sustained by a combination of the public and private sector, while ensuring that it is overseen and led by members of the community.

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