

RHODE ISLAND

FAMILY PROSPERITY INDEX

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2017 UPDATE

What if we were to realize that our state's long-held public policy approach—which mainly seeks to address the material hardships of our state's residents—has actually led to the unintended consequence of weakening opportunity and overall family prosperity by ignoring their cultural and familial needs? By creating a sense of over-reliance on government assistance, what if we actually reduced the opportunity for upward family mobility?

As **Franklin Delano Roosevelt**, a creator of the American social safety net state as we know it, said himself in 1935:

... [C]ontinued dependence upon relief induces a spiritual disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fiber. To dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit.

The Family Prosperity Index, or FPI, seeks to measure that fiber by assessing the degree to which each individual state offers an environment for families to thrive. FPI comprehensively measures the economic and social factors that contribute to family prosperity, filling in the gaps around inadequate measures such as the state unemployment rate, which is solely a narrow economic variable.

The 2016 Rhode Island Family Prosperity Report showed that our families suffered especially in the areas of *out-migration, self-sufficiency, family structure, economics, and family health (especially illicit drug use)*. The report also demonstrated that the best path to upward mobility is through **work and marriage**.

The 2017 data shows slight overall improvement, but our state still ranks a discouraging 45th nationally.



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RHODE ISLAND'S RANK



On the 2017 Family Prosperity Index (FPI), Rhode Island has only the 45th best score, or 6th worst (4.20) in the country—down slightly (-0.3 percent) since 2012 (4.21).

Rhode Island's greatest improvement during this period came in its **Demographics** score, which increased by 25.1 percent to 3.00 in 2017 from 2.40 in 2012. Correspondingly, Rhode Island's rank in this major index category increased to 45th from 49th—although significantly more work needs to be done.

More specifically, the increase in Rhode Island's **Demographics** score was due to improvements in all five sub-indices: scores for *population under 18* increased by 13 percent, *population over 65* by 4 percent, *net natural population growth* by 3 percent, *migration* by 115 percent, and *fertility* by 25 percent.

In 2016, the Ocean State scored worst in the U.S. for *illicit drug use*, dragging down its **Family Health** score and rank to 3.96 and 50th, respectively. The change in methodology* used to measure drug use in 2017 resulted in a better score for that sub-index, but Rhode Island's rank in **Family Health** dropped from 31st in the 2016 FPI to 36th in the 2017 FPI.

Rhode Island's greatest decline during this period came in its **Family Self-Sufficiency** score, which decreased by -9.8 percent to 4.27 in 2017 from 4.73 in 2012. Correspondingly, Rhode Island's rank in this major index category dropped to 41st from 32nd.

The decrease in Rhode Island's **Family Self-Sufficiency** score was due to declines in four out of the five sub-indices: scores for *prisoners* declined by -12 percent, *Medicaid* by -17 percent, *government burden* by -10 percent, and *charity* by -13 percent. Only the *welfare* sub-index improved by a mere 0.4 percent.

Rhode Island's Score and Rank in the Family Prosperity Index | 2012 to 2017

INDEX	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		Percent Change
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	
Total	4.21	46	4.22	46	4.18	47	4.14	45	4.03	47	4.20	45	-0.3%
Economics	4.13	41	4.53	34	4.29	38	4.27	39	3.76	45	4.28	43	3.6%
Demographics	2.40	49	2.49	48	2.53	48	2.92	47	2.78	47	3.00	45	25.1%
Family Self-Sufficiency	4.73	32	4.79	30	4.81	33	4.76	33	4.24	41	4.27	41	-9.8%
Family Structure	4.44	39	3.74	47	3.96	46	3.46	48	3.49	50	4.12	41	-7.2%
Family Culture	4.88	26	5.01	24	4.84	28	5.13	23	5.18	25	4.94	27	1.2%
Family Health	4.67	34	4.79	30	4.64	31	4.30	46	4.75	31	4.57	36	-2.1%

Source: American Conservative Union Foundation

*In the 2017 FPI **Family Health** major index, *illicit drug use* was incorporated into the former *alcohol-tobacco-obesity* sub-index and renamed the *risk behavior* sub-index. Additionally, illicit drug use has been disaggregated into *marijuana use* and *illicit drug use other than marijuana* in order to account for the differential physical impacts of marijuana vs. harder drugs such as heroin, cocaine, crystal meth, etc. Also, marijuana is becoming less illicit as more states (e.g., California, Nevada, Massachusetts, and Maine in 2016) legalize its use.

SUMMARY

Rhode Islanders want to keep the Ocean State as our home, to see our relocated loved ones return, and to attract other families from across the country to settle and work here. We want meaningful work and financial security now, with ample hope for a bright future. We would much rather welcome and see the headlights of those on the highways pouring *into* our state, as opposed to waving good-bye and seeing the taillights of those we are driving away.

Rhode Island must tackle its illicit drug problem and set itself on a path to grow its family and business population, thus increasing its productivity and tax base and improving the quality of life for its resident families.

Not All Problems Beg for Government Action

The solutions to many of the problems contributing to Rhode Island’s poor FPI ranking should not rest solely—or, in many cases, at all—in the hands of government officials. As the FPI measures economic, demographic, and cultural indicators, *many problems should be understood and addressed by religious, business, and other community leaders and civic organizations—in alignment with parallel policy reforms.*

A Robust Civil Society is Needed


To achieve all of these ambitious goals in the pursuit of greater family prosperity, the committed engagement of political, business, civic, and religious leaders is essential. All sectors of our state and communities must collaborate to reduce the corrosive influence of over-reliance on government programs by Rhode Island families—a major challenge indeed.

Before real solutions that help families can be formulated, we all must first agree on the problem and embark on a new path to achieve increased family prosperity. The **Family Prosperity Index** shows us the way.

In response to this civic challenge, a new state initiative has evolved: the **Rhode Island Families Coalition**. The Coalition is a non-partisan group of civil society leaders who have pledged to advance the well-being of all families and individuals in our state. Founded by conservative activist **Mike Stenhouse** and by civil rights advocate **Ray Rickman**, the focus of the group is to identify concrete and practical measures that transcend political ideology and help families to achieve greater self-sufficiency and upward mobility. It is time for the left and right to stop talking past one another and find common ground so as to become a powerful, united voice for reform.

We encourage community, non-profit, religious, and business leaders of good will and an open mind to become engaged in the RI Families Coalition.



Be part of the solution or volunteer: Read and share the Rhode Island FPI report. RIFamilies.org  **RIFamilies**



MEASURE	NATIONAL RANK	NEW ENGLAND RANK
ECONOMICS MAJOR INDEX RATINGS	43	6
Private Sector	33	4
Household Income	17	4
Cost-of-Living	33	2
Entrepreneurship	38	3
Unemployment	39	6
DEMOGRAPHICS MAJOR INDEX RATINGS	45	2
Under 18	47	3
Over 65	37	3
Net Natural Population Change	46	4
Migration	29	3
Fertility	46	2
FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY MAJOR INDEX RATINGS	41	6
Prisoners	13	5
Medicaid	47	5
Welfare	29	6
Government Burden	39	4
Charity	44	4
FAMILY STRUCTURE MAJOR INDEX RATINGS	41	6
Children in Married-Couple Households	45	6
Marriages	20	4
Divorces	11	2
State of Households	49	6
Family Poverty	30	6
FAMILY CULTURE MAJOR INDEX RATINGS	27	6
Births to Unwed Mothers	44	6
Violent Crime	11	5
Property Crime	8	5
Religion	42	2
Education	25	5
FAMILY HEALTH MAJOR INDEX RATINGS	36	6
Years of Productive Life Lost	33	6
Risk Behavior	38	3
Sexually Transmitted Diseases	12	5
Infant Survival	38	3
Self Mortality	39	5

Source: Rhode Island Center for Freedom and Prosperity and American Conservative Union Foundation