

Chris O'Brien

From: Jordan Goyette <goyettejordan@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, July 21, 2020 12:00 PM
To: Chris O'Brien
Subject: Why we need a Justice Budget

Dear members of the House Finance Committee,

The COVID-19 pandemic has **starkly highlighted the deep inequities in our society and our economy that have often been mentioned, but never truly addressed.** White supremacy and racism, capitalist exploitation, patriarchy, heterosexism and ableism are the root causes of our fractured society and unbalanced economy. We cannot continue this way.

We must ensure that all Rhode Islanders have what they need to thrive, not merely survive. The tragedies of the pandemic must move us toward a systemic, intentional set of policies and investments that are grounded in our shared future. We must acknowledge the root causes of our fractured society and be deliberate in our actions to move ahead. **All of our neighbors, citizens and immigrants alike, must be part of plans for shared prosperity.** We must hold corporations to account as good citizens of our state, and ensure that our tax system is fair and equitable. **Together, we'll rebuild a Rhode Island that works for all of us, not just the well-connected few.**

Housing

Provide quality, sustainable, genuinely affordable and permanent housing for all RI residents, especially those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity during the Covid-19 pandemic and those that will be pushed into housing insecurity as a result of measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Achieving this requires that we:

1. Establish a dedicated funding stream in the state's general budget for affordable housing production and operation of at least \$8 million in FY21, set to increase annually.
2. At least double the proposed affordable housing bond in FY21.
3. Maintain the dedicated source of revenue for rental vouchers and hotel costs for Rhode Islanders experiencing homelessness, with a mandate to increase it annually, based on need.
4. Make adequate funding available for housing programs and rental vouchers to support individuals released from incarceration, including those for whom a lease or other housing accommodation is a prerequisite for securing parole and funding sufficient to meet the need for housing programs that support individuals ineligible for public and other forms of subsidized housing due to their records, including sufficient funding for programs to house those with sex offender status.

Economic Justice

Ensure all Rhode Islanders can meet their basic necessities and seek to create meaningful, life-sustaining work for all residents. Compensate RI's essential workers industry standard hazard pay and provide professional grade protective equipment for this and future public health emergencies. Ensure that programs intended to meet the needs of low-income Rhode Islanders who can't work, are transitioning, or otherwise without adequate employment provide a high quality of life and access to educational and other opportunities to thrive. Achieving this requires that we:

1. Raise the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) from 15% - 20% for tax year 2020.
2. Pass a \$15/hour statewide minimum wage with hazard pay for all frontline or essential workers.
3. Expand the state's unemployment insurance program to match the federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), including unemployment insurance for freelancers, self-employed, and gig workers, as well as for those leaving work due to sexual or domestic violence.
4. Raise income tax on top 1% and do not implement any new tax cuts or rollbacks.
5. Increase the benefit amount and the annual clothing allowance for RI Works recipients.

6. Increase funding for social safety net programs based on the increase in need due to the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Privatize the state's management of our Medicaid system and use the savings to restore the years of cuts in state funding.

Criminal Justice

In achieving a just and equitable state budget in the face of lost revenues, seek to significantly decrease the state's prison and jail population and thus taxpayer expense, **reduce reliance on police for responding to harm** and invest in meaningful community-based services and alternatives to **policing and incarceration** informed by those most directly impacted by the criminal legal system. Prisons have always been a public health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic makes all the more clear that, in order to respond to the pressing crisis and support long term change, the state needs to shift resources away from criminalization and incarceration and towards community based support and alternatives to policing, incarceration and detention. In the meantime, ensure infection protection and maintain the health and safety of everyone incarcerated at the Rhode Island *Adult Correctional Institution*, as well as their loved ones. Achieving this requires that we:

1. Targeting budgetary savings through efforts to decrease the state's prison, jail, immigration detention, and youth corrections population, including parole and early release, as well as broad criminal justice reforms that result in fewer Rhode Islanders sentenced to jail and prison time.
 1. This should include the implementation of geriatric parole for all people incarcerated over the age of 50, expedited parole for those within 6 months of release, and an end to detention for technical violations of parole and probation.
 2. This should include cutting \$20.1 million dollars for the construction of new prison facilities, as well as closing the High Security facility.
2. Target budgetary savings through efforts to decrease the size of the police force and decrease funding for police to be reinvested in health care, education and affordable housing.
 1. This should include cutting \$35 million dollars for the construction of new State Police barracks.
3. Support and fund community based services, alternatives to policing, incarceration and detention, and re-entry supports, such as local mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, education programming and affordable housing. Such services are not only more cost effective than incarceration, but address underlying issues, preventing crime from occurring in the first place.
 1. Make adequate funding available for housing programs and rental vouchers to support individuals re-entering society after incarceration, including those for whom a lease or other housing accommodation is a prerequisite for securing parole. Ensure there is adequate funding for housing programs that support individuals ineligible for public and other forms of subsidized housing due to their records.
4. Establish funding for free access to phone calls and video visitation, to enable easy, accessible communication with loved ones. Designate funding to provide tablets at no-cost to all people incarcerated at the ACI. Tablets allow incarcerated people to have access to education programming and other programming, as well as parole hearings, while in-person programming is suspended.
5. This moment we find ourselves in is one not seen since the Great Depression preceding WWII. President Roosevelt came into office in 1932 and appropriately realized that the invisible hand of the private market had failed to catch our economy from free-falling. He proposed not forcing people to tighten their belts through brutal austerity policies, but instead decided to transform the federal government's relationship towards its citizens like it had never been seen before. And so he came up with The New Deal. And this crisis we find ourselves in compels us to once again realize FDR's vision and propose a just budget that created a 21st century New Deal for our people. It will take Rhode Island out of this crisis and make it even stronger than we were before. Please ensure the FY '21 state budget is a true Justice Budget.

6. Thank You,

7. Jordan Goyette

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