



**RHODE ISLAND  
DEMOCRATIC PARTY**

**2018 Platform**

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## **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Rhode Island Democrats embrace the tenets upon which the state was founded: independence and freedom from persecution. The spirit that lead our great state to be the first colony to renounce the British crown is with us today as we continue our fight *for the people*.

In all our actions we strive to recall the words of our founder, Roger Williams, who was the first American to advocate genuine political democracy: “The sovereign power of all civil authority is founded in the consent of the people.”

Rhode Island Democrats continue to build a better state for all, placing a priority on the development of individual potential—regardless of zip code—and the preservation of our collective freedoms. This platform is our statement of principles and positions. As Democratic activists and elected officials, we seek to embrace the goals set forth in this Party platform.

## **PREAMBLE**

The Rhode Island Democratic Party is a party of progress, willing and committed to taking action on behalf of the people of Rhode Island in order to ensure that everyone in our state has the chance to reach their potential. We believe in preserving open, honest, and efficient government that is responsive to the needs of the Rhode Island citizen: a government of honesty and integrity that can adapt to the ever-changing political environment of Rhode Island. To that end, we shall put forth leaders that the public can trust and hold to the highest ethical standards. In doing so, our Party will restore Rhode Island's faith in its public servants.

The Democratic Party will always remain active in the quest for economic growth and opportunity. We will continue the work of ushering in new jobs for Rhode Islanders and protect the working men and women of this state, and help ensure a decent standard of living for the Rhode Island family. We will continue the drive to strengthen the school systems of this state so as to provide Rhode Island with a skilled and motivated workforce.

We believe every Rhode Islander must have health care, and our Party will work with national leaders to make this plan a reality. Health care reform must address the problem of cost so as to provide a system that is affordable to every Rhode Islander. The Democratic Party will continue the battle to protect a woman's right to choose. We shall never relinquish our commitment to the senior citizens of this state in need of care and assistance. Our commitment will remain strong to the financially disadvantaged and those left on the fringes of society due to a cycle of poverty and/or discrimination.

We will take action to preserve and protect the rights of each and every Rhode Islander regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity or expression and religion.

These are the values of the Rhode Island State Democratic Party.

## **JOBS AND THE ECONOMY**

One of the major components of the Rhode Island Democratic Platform is to increase the number of good jobs available to the citizens of Rhode Island. We must make this state a desirable place to do business and generate a reasonable profit.

Our Party believes that a well-educated, motivated workforce and a level playing field in the realm of employment are key to attracting new business and building a sustainable economy.

We believe that learning the fundamentals early is important. We should not train our children for just one job, but give them the tools to pursue any job opportunity in our global economy. By stressing in our schools the basics of reading, writing and analytical thinking, our workforce becomes not only adaptable, but also highly productive. The basics of schooling should include making post-secondary education available and affordable to all. We support targeted tax cuts that will help make college degrees as common as high school diplomas.

Our Party knows that nothing is more important than creating good-paying jobs that can support a middle-class life—from nurses, firefighters, and teachers to construction workers, factory workers, and small business owners. That is why we are committed to doing everything we can to build a full employment economy, where everyone has a job that pays enough to raise a family and live in dignity with a sense of purpose. Rhode Island Democrats will build strong, sustained, shared economic growth.

We know that when our nation comes together, we can do amazing things. In the last century, our leaders came together across the aisle to electrify the nation, build the Interstate Highway System, support groundbreaking research in medicine, science, and communications, and send a man to the moon. When we are bold and ambitious, we can do big things and make our economy stronger for decades to come.

If we are serious about reversing the decline of the middle class, we need major investments to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure and put Rhode Islanders back to work in decent paying jobs in both the public and private sectors. The climate emergency and the need to expand the middle class demand that we make the most ambitious investment in infrastructure since President Eisenhower created the interstate highway system. We will put Rhode Islanders to work updating and expanding our roads, bridges, public transit, airports, and passenger and freight rail lines. We will build 21st century energy and water systems, modernize our schools, and continue to support the expansion of high-speed broadband networks. We will protect communities from the impact of climate change and help them to mitigate its effects by investing in green and resilient infrastructure thereby helping our environment and fostering new jobs and industry.

Our Party believes one of the best ways to innovate, prosper, and create good-paying jobs is to make more in America, which is why we firmly support Rhode Island manufacturing with a “Make it in America” plan. We must revitalize our hard-hit manufacturing sector and create thriving hubs of manufacturing and innovation – leveraging the talent located at our world class colleges and universities.

Our Party will help Rhode Island workers compete for jobs and investments in clean energy, high-tech products, internet technology products, and advanced manufacturing and vehicles. We

must make manufacturing more internationally competitive by making it the greenest and most efficient in the world, including by investing in industrial energy efficiency.

Rhode Island Democrats support ambitious public and private investments in science, technology, and research. We are focused on creating good jobs in communities across America. Entrepreneurship and innovation are fundamental to our future economic growth—in the information technology (IT) industry as well as energy, manufacturing, transportation, health, retail, services, and countless other sectors. We will nurture the next generation of scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs, especially women and people of color, to make sure our state and our nation continue to out-compete and out-innovate the rest of the world with our bold innovation agenda.

The Rhode Island Democratic Party will make it easier to start and grow a small business in our great state. By supporting small business and entrepreneurship, we can grow jobs faster in Rhode Island. We will cut the red tape that holds back small businesses and entrepreneurs. We will open up access to credit because we know that small businesses are some of the best job creators in our country. Rhode Island Democrats also realize the critical importance of small businesses as engines of opportunity for women, people of color, tribes, and people in rural America, and will work to nurture entrepreneurship.

## **FAIRNESS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

Democrats believe we must break down the barriers holding Rhode Islanders back and restore the basic bargain that built Rhode Island's middle class: If you work hard and play by the rules, you can get ahead and stay ahead. Too many Rhode Islanders are living paycheck to paycheck, and the hallmarks of a middle class life—owning a home, having access to affordable and quality childcare, paid family and medical leave, retiring with dignity—feel out of reach. The Rhode Island Democratic Party understands that supporting workers through higher wages, workplace protections, policies to balance work and family, and other investments will help rebuild our middle class for the 21st century.

Our Party believes that no one who works full time should have to raise a family in poverty. We support the goal that all Rhode Islanders should earn at least \$15 an hour, and we are committed to raising the minimum wage to a living wage and ensuring equal pay, regardless of gender. Democrats also believe that no Rhode Islander should have to choose between a paycheck and caring for their own health or the health of a loved one, and we support the right of all workers to earn a reasonable number of paid sick days. We recognize that since the Great Recession, most new income and wealth in our country has gone to the top one percent. We are committed to reversing this growing inequality, and believe in tax policies that support the middle class and that do not sacrifice working families for the sake of the wealthy few.

As Democrats, we believe the right to collectively bargain is essential so that working men and women have the strength to improve their living standards, provide for their families, and contribute to building a strong and vibrant middle class. We believe that government, at its best, supports and protects the rights of workers and support the rights of all public and private sector workers to organize in order to collectively bargain for livable wages, fair benefits, and safe working conditions. To that end, we believe so-called “right to work” laws are wrong for all workers and oppose any effort to enact such laws in Rhode Island. We vigorously oppose efforts

that would eliminate dues check-off procedures, roll-back prevailing wage standards, abolish fair share requirements, efforts to roll back federal overtime rules and other measures designed to restrict workers' rights.

## **EDUCATION**

Our Party believes that every child, no matter who they are, how much their families earn, or where they live, should have access to a high-quality education, from preschool to all day kindergarten through high school and beyond. This education should be provided in structurally sound, well maintained buildings with up to date technology.

Our Party believes all Rhode Islanders should have the opportunity to pursue higher education regardless of ability to pay. Democrats are unified in their strong belief that every student should be able to graduate from college debt-free, and working families should be able to attend public colleges and universities tuition-free.

As we make college affordable for future students, we will not forget about the millions of college graduates and their families who bear unsustainable levels of student debt and who need help right now. Democrats support programs that allow refinancing of that debt to accelerate payoffs and lower interest rates so that college graduates and their families will have more resources available for housing, medical care and consumer spending to help get Rhode Island's economy moving again.

We recognize and honor all of the professionals who work in public schools to support students' education — teachers, education support professionals, and specialized staff. We know that good teachers are essential to improving student learning and helping all students to meet high academic standards. We will bring stakeholders together to lift up and trust our educators, continually build their capacity, and ensure that our schools are safe, welcoming, collaborative, and well-resourced places for our students, educators, and communities.

## **UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE**

We believe that health care is a right for all Rhode Islanders and not just a privilege. We need to improve our health care system to make this a reality. There are too many people who are still unable to receive the appropriate health care that they need. We can and must do better. By lowering overhead, improving education and providing affordable access and care we will save millions of dollars and keep costs down for subscribers. We also believe that we can lower health care costs by consolidating overhead and administration expenses, reducing duplicative processes and streamlining the system, including a public option, if available. We support the ongoing training of health care professionals and online access to medical cards and statements for patients and their caregivers. And, our Party believes that we must be fair to those who care and ensure that all direct care professionals in the health care field are paid a living wage.

We support Rhode Islanders living healthier and longer lives by having easier access to wellness programs and easier and better coverage for physical therapy, chiropractic services, acupuncture, nutrition counseling and exercise programs such as yoga. We support localized community health care centers as a way to improve services and help to keep costs down – especially with the inclusion of nutritionists, mental health counselors and affordable dental care. We believe

that Rhode Island's LGBT community must be able to access all services that they need for a healthy lifestyle and these services need to be welcoming and non-judgmental. And, we support more quality and affordable choices for pregnancy and giving birth including alternative options such as midwifery and doulas.

We believe that we must urgently combat the heroin overdose epidemic and addictions to opiates, alcohol and other drugs and we urge our insurance companies to do more. We must reduce our society's addiction to prescription drugs, which are often the gateway to illegal drugs, and increase access to alternative pain relievers. We support efforts to reduce, especially with our teens, the harmful effects of all tobacco and e-cigarette products. And we believe in robust funding and support for addiction and recovery programs, which are rebuilding lives and families.

Our Party believes that we must treat mental health issues with the same care and seriousness that we treat issues of physical health, by supporting a robust mental health workforce, and promoting better integration of the behavioral and general health care systems. Recognizing that maintaining good mental health is critical to all people, including young people's health and development, we will work with health professionals to ensure that all children have access to mental health care.

## **A MATTER OF CHOICE**

As Democrats, we stand behind the right of every woman to make reproductive medical decisions about her own body in consultation with her doctor, without governmental prohibitions or burdensome restrictions, consistent with *Roe v. Wade*. We view a woman's right to choose as a private matter, which is a fundamental liberty protected by the United States Constitution. Therefore, we will fight to protect a woman's right and a family's right to seek medical care wherever they wish, regardless of ability to pay, and we support laws designed to protect that right. Further, we support efforts to improve contraceptive access and research, family planning and policies that support healthy child bearing and strong parenting skills.

## **REDUCING GUN VIOLENCE**

As Democrats, we respect the Constitution's Second Amendment and its guaranteed rights for law-abiding citizens to keep and bear arms. At the same time, we recognize that there is a serious issue with gun violence in our country, and we support regulations regarding the safe use of firearms. We are proud of the thoughtful work that has been done in our state to ensure the safety of our children and our communities and we support passage of other common sense measures aimed at protecting the public from individuals who have demonstrated their inability to possess a firearm without putting others around them in danger. We believe that we must provide the public with the tools to be proactive partners with law enforcement to reduce gun violence. To keep our communities safe, Rhode Island Democrats insist that Congress enact legislation to require unlicensed gun sellers at gun shows and private gun dealers to conduct the same instant background checks that licensed dealers need to conduct using the National Criminal Instant Background Check System. Additionally, we support laws that protects our children and our families and will work to support common sense gun violence prevention measures. Finally, because we view gun violence as a public health issue, we also call on Congress to pass legislation allowing the Centers for Disease Control to study this issue.

## **HOUSING**

All Rhode Islanders deserve to live in safe, quality homes that do not consume more than one-third of their household budgets.

The Democratic Party supports an integrated approach to housing policy that ensures a variety of housing choices so that all Rhode Islanders can live in healthy quality homes in vibrant and thriving neighborhoods. We support programs that facilitate home ownership for first-time homeowners, that provide safe, supportive housing for homeless veterans and that offers options to seniors looking to downsize. We support affordable rental programs for Rhode Islanders such as efforts to rehabilitate abandoned and blighted housing. And, because of the connection between housing stability and success in school, we support policies that ensure that all Rhode Island children have stable, safe, lead-free, healthy housing that their families can afford without sacrificing nutritious food or health care in order to pay the rent or the mortgage.

Because diverse communities are healthy, stable communities, we support policies that foster diverse housing options in all of Rhode Island's thirty-nine cities and towns.

## **IMMIGRATION**

Since its inception immigrants have played the key role in the development of the United States. Today we, as Rhode Island Democrats, believe that those seeking a better life in the United States should be treated with respect and dignity. We support comprehensive immigration reform, which includes improving border security, and prioritizing those who pose a threat to the safety of our communities, not hardworking families who are contributing to their communities. We oppose enforcement of the current immigration laws leading to the absurd result of families being separated at the border. Moreover, we should put a stop to raids and roundups of children and families, along with the deportation of those who served in our armed forces (and their immediate family members). We want to see Congress create a faster path to citizenship for veterans and those who legally seek asylum. We oppose any religious tests to bar immigrants or refugees from entering the United States. Rhode Island Democrats overwhelmingly support programs such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and we seek to help residents of our state on the path to citizenship who are here with Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

## **VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES**

Our Party believes that our state and our nation have a sacred, moral responsibility to keep faith with all our veterans and wounded warriors. We must take care of those who have put their lives on the line to defend us. That is why we will push for more educational benefits and job training, end chronic homelessness and combat suicide, and reintegration. We will fight for every veteran to have timely access to high - quality health care and timely processing of claims and appeals. Rhode Island Democrats will support military families with jobs, education, childcare, and health care. We will promote family - friendly policies and champion efforts to care for our military family members, especially for the spouses and children who have to rebuild their lives after the loss of a loved one or life - altering injury or disability.

## **SUPPORT FOR SENIOR CITIZENS**

Rhode Island Democrats are committed to ensure that seniors do not have to choose between putting food on the table, keeping a roof over their heads, or buying the medication that they need to stay healthy. Rhode Island Democrats are committed to programs that provide income security for senior citizens, including federal efforts to protect and expand Social Security and state efforts to protect pensions when pension plans are in distress.

We strongly support the federal Older Americans Act, which funds critical programs to help seniors remain independent in their own homes and communities. We support policies that strengthen and expand the home care workforce, give seniors and people with disabilities access to quality, affordable long-term care, services, and supports, and ensure that all of these resources are readily available at home or in the community. We are also committed to policies and programs that address the growing problems of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM**

Democrats believe in a fair and impartial criminal justice system that strives to rehabilitate incarcerated individuals and reunite them with their communities in a way that decreases recidivism and promotes positive and lasting lifestyle changes. We understand that our current system of mass incarceration and our excessive probation rate are not effectively achieving these goals, despite great taxpayer expense. We support efforts to reduce the growth in our incarcerated population by prioritizing probation supervision resources and expanding funding to community-based programs with the goal of reducing recidivism.

We also recognize that our current system disproportionately criminalizes communities of color. Rhode Islanders of color face more surveillance in their communities and greater obstacles within the criminal justice system, and we are committed to striving for racial justice at every level of our criminal justice system.

The Rhode Island Democratic Party supports efforts to work with our local law enforcement agencies to foster lasting and quality relationships between the communities they serve and their departments. We believe it is possible to respect and honor our police officers who bravely serve and protect our state while also insisting upon a culture of collaboration, cooperation and respect for those they have sworn to protect and serve.

## **CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES**

The Rhode Island Democratic Party believes in equal rights and equitable treatment of all, regardless of race, color, religion, creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ancestry, place of birth, age, physical or mental condition, military service, or economic status. Democrats believe discrimination, of any kind, is contrary to the ideals of American equality and freedom and has no place in our society and communities. Since our beginning, Rhode Island has been a leader in civil rights for its citizens from religion to marriage equality. We believe all Rhode Islanders have the unequivocal right to thrive and prosper economically, socially, culturally, and politically within our state and we strive to ensure local and state government works for all.

## **THE ENVIRONMENT**

Climate change is an existential threat to our state and a defining challenge of our time. Already, municipalities from Newport to Westerly are impacted by rising seas and flooding is growing more severe across our state. The best science tells us that without ambitious, immediate action across our economy to cut carbon pollution and other greenhouse gases, all of these impacts will be far worse in the future. We cannot leave our children a Rhode Island that has been profoundly damaged.

The Rhode Island Democratic Party has a deep commitment to tackling the climate challenge, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and creating good-paying middle class jobs in the process. We support the goals of the Resilient Rhode Island Act, and believe our state must be running entirely on clean energy by mid-century. We will take bold steps to slash carbon pollution and protect clean air, ensure no Rhode Islanders are left behind as we accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy, and be responsible stewards of our natural resources and our public lands and waters. Our Party rejects the notion that we have to choose between protecting our environment and creating good-paying jobs. We can and we will do both.

In order to achieve these ambitious goals, the Rhode Island Democratic Party is committed to supporting the growth of new renewable energy projects. While we will not get to 100% clean energy overnight, we understand that we will never get there if we continue to invest in massive fossil fuel infrastructure projects that increase our emissions. Rhode Island's offshore wind farm, the first in the country, showcased Rhode Island as a leader in this clean energy transition. Our Party believes these projects are the future of energy policy in Rhode Island, and we are committed to prioritizing them over proposals for dirtier and more dangerous fossil fuel investments.

Rhode Island Democrats believe that state government should lead by example, which is why we support taking steps to power the government with 100 percent clean electricity. We also believe that carbon dioxide, methane, and other greenhouse gases should be priced to reflect their negative externalities, and to accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy and help to meet our climate goals. We will work to expand access to cost-saving renewable energy by low-income households, create good-paying jobs in communities that have struggled with energy poverty, and oppose efforts by utilities to limit consumer choice or slow clean energy deployment.

## **ETHICS AND DEMOCRACY**

Our Party believes that public officials should be held to the highest standards of integrity and accountability. We believe that government should be open and inclusive. We know that preserving the public's trust in government is critically important to the future of our democracy. As such, we support public hearings and other opportunities for citizens to influence the legislative process; developing and utilizing accessible technologies to allow citizens to more directly interface with government and public services; introducing and ratifying a Constitutional Amendment to overturn the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*; strong Ethics reforms that maintain the integrity of government. We also support ensuring that the public has convenient, inexpensive, and quick access to all public documents, at

the executive, legislative, judicial, and local levels of government. In order to achieve this, all public information should be posted on government websites, using a machine-readable format.

We believe that voting is a right, not a privilege, and that every step should be taken to ensure that all eligible citizens vote in every election by eliminating voter participation barriers. This means that registration should be made as easy as possible, polls should be safe and accessible, the voting process should be quick and efficient, and no citizen should be denied access to the polls. We support online voter registration, pre-registration and early voting as tools to making voting easier and more accessible for Rhode Islanders. We believe every vote should be counted and that all ballots cast should produce an independent auditable record.