

The Road So Far

Legislative Session 2022

The fight to make policy, to transform the laws that shape our social world, begins long before a bill is scheduled for a vote. The Latino Policy Institute works with the Latino community to resist our historical marginalization by centering the issues relevant to our lives. *We advocate in and with community.*

Our priorities for this legislative session are Licenses for All, Postpartum Care, Cover All Kids, and Let RI Vote.

Licenses for All



Latino Policy Institute (Executive Director Marcela Betancur and Policy Associate Joshua Segui-Rodriguez) partnered with Progreso Latino (Policy Associate Jonathan Dejesus) to host a Licenses for All testimony preparation community event.

For nearly a decade, the Latino Policy Institute has advocated with our partners for legislation ([H-7708](#) and [S-2006](#)) that would allow the division of motor vehicles to issue driving privilege cards and driving privilege permits to undocumented applicants, better known as the Safe Roads Act or Licenses for All. Our [2017 analysis](#) found that states that provide driving privileges have lower traffic fatalities, lower cost of car insurance, and declining poverty rates. Today, sixteen states, including Vermont, Connecticut, and

Massachusetts have all approved driving privileges for undocumented people. In the 2021 legislative session, Licenses for All passed in the Senate for the first time. Although it ultimately did not become law, this narrow miss reinvigorated our advocacy efforts.

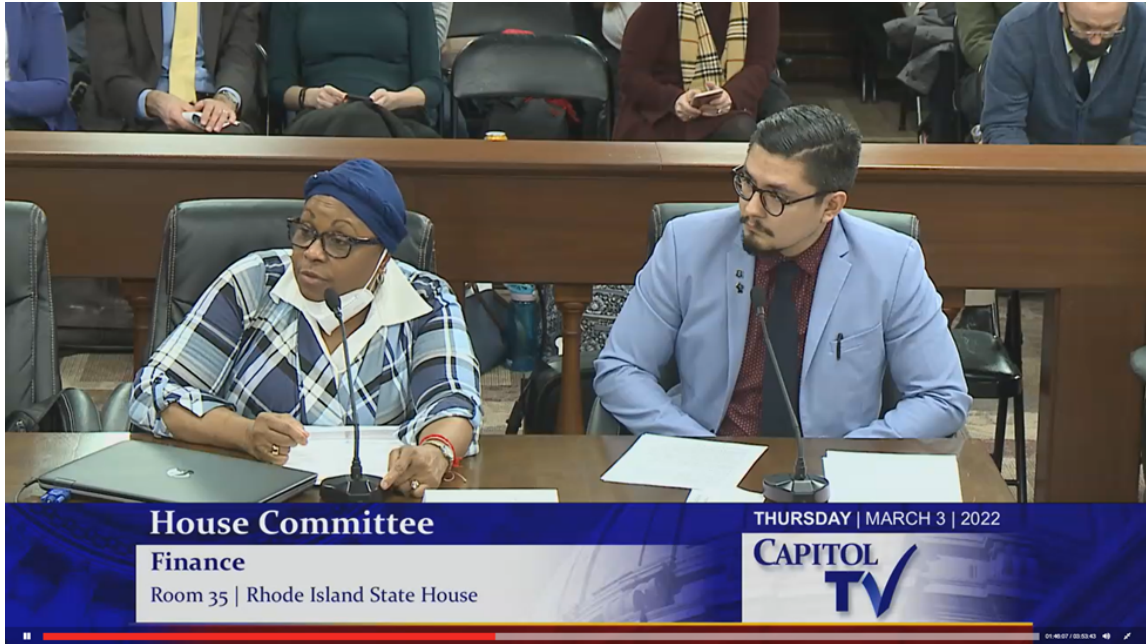
During this legislative session, we met with community members at Progreso Latino for a testimony preparation information session. LPI discussed the importance of community voice and how to go about preparing verbal and written testimony. We collected over thirty pieces of personal testimony written in Spanish and other languages. In partnership with Progreso Latino, our teams translated and submitted all community testimony for hearings in the Senate and the House. In attending the state house to present our organization's verbal testimony, we were proud to stand in support of Licenses for All with many of the same people we met at the information session.

During the next few months, we will work with our partners from the Immigration Coalition and our Legislative sponsors to ensure that this year, RI finally provides Licenses for All!

Postpartum Care

The Latino Policy Institute is advocating for postpartum care legislation ([H-7290](#) & [S-2202](#)) that would extend postpartum coverage from 60 days to a full year. In the United States, about half of pregnancy related deaths occur postpartum and most pregnancy related deaths can be prevented. While this problem needs to be addressed on multiple fronts, ensuring that people who bear children have access to postpartum care will be an important step in the right direction, one that will undoubtedly save lives.

Currently, Rhode Island provides Medicaid to pregnant people with incomes up to 258% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), including 60 days of postpartum coverage. In 2020, of the 10,101 births in Rhode Island, 48% (about 4848 births) were financed through Medicaid. After 60 days, income eligibility requirements for Medicaid fall from 258% to 141% of FPL by transitioning from pregnancy coverage to parental coverage. Many child bearers due to either their income or their immigration status lose healthcare coverage during a period of high pregnancy related mortality. Extending postpartum care from 60 days to a full year will capture thousands of child bearers in Rhode Island who could otherwise experience a dangerous gap in healthcare coverage.



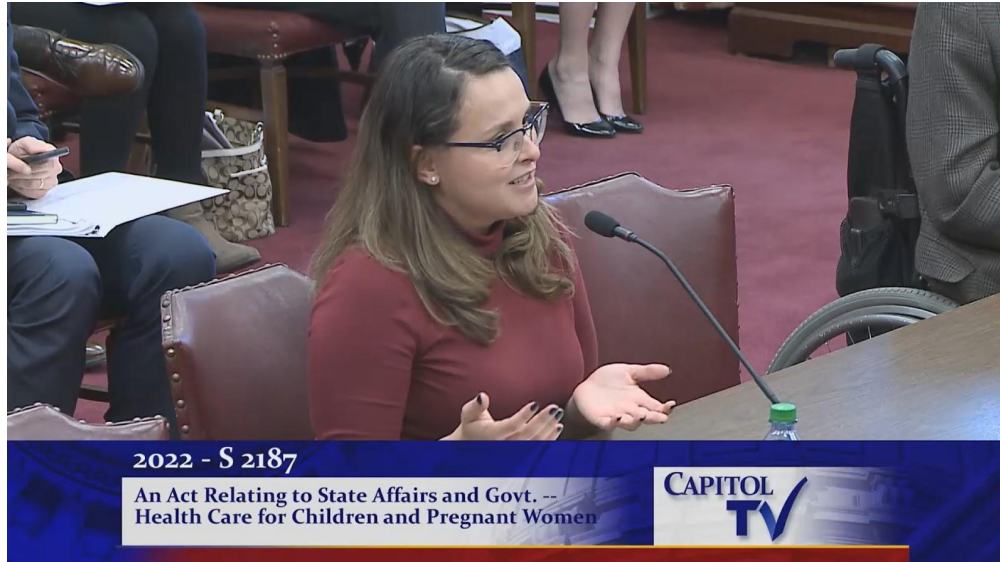
Representative Anastasia P. Williams and Representative David Morales testify for Postpartum Care and Cover All Kids respectively.

LPI has applied for a grant to support our continued postpartum care advocacy and to aid in implementation and outreach efforts should the legislation pass.

Cover All Kids

For the second year in a row, LPI in coalition with RI Kids Count, Progreso Latino, and the Economic Progress Institute is advocating for Cover All Kids legislation. This critical legislation (bills [H-7484](#) and [S-2187](#)) would provide health insurance coverage to children who are not eligible for Rite Care due to their immigration status. There are currently hundreds of children all over our state without basic healthcare access. We believe that Rhode Island's continued inaction, under these circumstances, is a choice with fiscal and moral implications.

LPI launched its advocacy efforts this legislative session by taking the lead in drafting a letter to Governor Mckee on behalf of the coalition. The letter urged the governor to include "Cover All Kids" funding into his FY 2023 budget proposal thereby increasing the likelihood that the legislation passes.



Executive Director Marcela Betancur gives verbal testimony in support of the Senate's Cover All Kids bill.

LPI worked with Doctor Beata Nelken, a pediatrician in Central Falls, to release an op-ed in the Boston Globe titled, [A pediatrician calls on Rhode Island to Cover All Kids](#). As a pediatrician who has practiced in Rhode Island for 20 years and has significant experience serving the undocumented community, Dr. Nelken was able to knowledgeably advocate for the inclusion of Cover All Kids funding in the Governor's budget proposal. She stated in part, *"I cannot just treat the children who were born in the United States, while others who are living in the shadows of our society are not receiving care due to their immigration status."*

LPI was thrilled to learn that Cover All Kids was ultimately included in the Governor's FY 2023 budget proposal. We then reached out to local elected leaders (Mayor Grebien and Mayor Rivera) requesting that they once again submit testimony in support of the passage of the Cover All Kids Bills. Both Mayors were happy to support this legislation. LPI joined with partners and community members to testify verbally and in writing in support of the Cover All Kids bills. Currently the Senate bill has passed out of committee and is placed on the Senate calendar for Tuesday, April 26th.

Let RI Vote

During the 2020 election, emergency measures temporarily expanded voting access giving more Rhode Islanders the opportunity to vote by mail or early in-person than ever before in state history, resulting in record voter turnout. In an effort to expand and codify these measures, the RI Voting Access Coalition created a campaign in 2021 known as the *Let RI Vote Campaign*. The Latino Policy Institute is proud to join over 30 organizations as a

member of this coalition. In fact, our Director, Marcela Betancur has been the spokesperson on behalf of the coalition since 2021.

The Let RI Vote Act ([H-7100](#) and [S-2007](#)) seeks to modernize and improve voting access in Rhode Island. It will provide access to mail ballots for those who need it without requiring a notary or two witness signatures. The Act also calls for the creation of an online form to request mail ballots, which will streamline this process for thousands of Rhode Islanders. Additionally, individuals living in nursing homes will be able to opt-in to a permanent mail ballot list. Lastly, the Act would also preserve an early voting option for voters who would like to cast their ballot in person during the 20-day “emergency voting” period before Election Day without the need for an excuse or special circumstance.



The RI Voting Access Coalition, which is composed of over thirty organizations, celebrated the passage of the Let RI Vote Act in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Accessible and equitable voting is essential for a robust democracy to function properly. The Latino Policy Institute has provided written and verbal testimony in support of the Let RI Vote bills. We’ve also worked closely with the Voting Access Coalition to spread awareness about the importance of protecting the right to vote.