



# RHODE ISLAND COALITION OF BLACK WOMEN

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## Questions for Rhode Island 2018 Mid-Term Election Candidates

As we prepare for the upcoming mid-term elections, the Rhode Island Coalition of Black Women, Inc. (RICBW) is raising issues of concern for Black girls and women in Rhode Island. RICBW advocates for state and local policies, which are just, equitable, and recognize the humanity of all people. The following questions are being presented to the Rhode Island state-wide candidates to provide a better understanding of their perspectives on these issues and their commitment to present and implement just and equitable solutions.

The policy issues we raise are designed to promote public policies that ensure stable and viable families and communities, a prepared workforce and enhance possibilities for entrepreneurship.

### **Economic Security:**

According to the Economic Policy Institute, Rhode Island Black women make 61 cents on the dollar earned by white males. Fifty-six percent of minimum wage workers are women and a third of them work part-time due to economic reasons, not because they choose to do so. Rhode Island has a higher poverty rate for Black/African American women than Connecticut and Massachusetts and it costs between two to three times the federal poverty level to meet basic needs in RI. Additionally, Black women with children are 71% of all Black female-headed households (2012 1-yr. ACS PUMS data, Housing Works RI).

- ***How can we create an environment in RI, which provides stronger living wages for women, particularly in fields predominantly occupied by black women and provide comprehensive, family centered leave policies?***

A 2007 Survey of Business Owners revealed of more than 37,000 RI women-owned firms, approximately 1,300 were Black/African American businesses. Despite institutional barriers discouraging access to capital, critical resources, and racial/gender discrimination in traditionally white male dominated sectors, entrepreneurship is still a choice of a growing number of African American women.

- *How can we help build in RI a stronger network among these women-owned businesses to compete for larger contracts and provide them with support, other than educational workshops?*

### **Housing Stability:**

Rhode Island is faced with a lack of affordable housing. Blacks/African Americans disproportionately experience the impact of the lack of affordable housing often leading to homelessness and housing instability. The impact of housing instability can negatively impact family dynamics and academic performance of displaced children. Furthermore, only approximately 30 percent of Black Rhode Island residents own a home (The State of Black Families in Rhode Island, 2017) indicating a need for greater accessibility to information and financing opportunities.

- *Do you support adding a line item in the state budget to provide resources to support affordable housing, including programs to encourage and support home ownership among Blacks/African Americans regardless of income?*

Many communities in Providence, Pawtucket and Central Falls, for example, are experiencing gentrification which results in higher rents, etc., which in turn destabilizes communities. As a result, many long-term residents and others are pushed out of these communities.

- *What is your position on building communities, like these, in ways that encourage and support the current residents?*

### **Education:**

As reported in numerous educational publications (ex. Education Week, August 2015), there is link between **dropping out of school and going to prison**. Notably over half of young black men who attend urban high schools do not earn a diploma. Prior to dropping out, many students of color (e.g. Black and Latino), both male and female, have been subject to disparate experiences with classroom and out-of school suspensions. Critically Black students are disproportionately suspended from class starting as early as preschool (per USDOE, 2014) Sadly current school discipline policies have been found to be unequal in implementation among of disciplinary policies regarding these students. Suspending students carries a very high economic cost as students who get suspended are more likely to drop out of school, earn less money and get involved in the criminal justice system.

- *How do you see your role, if elected, in improving and equalizing the existing disciplinary policies and school climate for urban youth of color in our educational system?*
- *Would you make it a priority to diversify the teacher workforce to be more reflective of the growing diversity within the Rhode Island population, particularly Blacks/African Americans?*

There is another layer of concern within the discussion of student discipline - the increase in the **suspension of Black girls**. According to the National Women's Law Center, schools are pushing Black girls out of their classroom in every state in significant rates. At the same time, girls are facing extremely high rates of harassment and violence, discrimination, trauma, and stereotyping. According to the 2014 RI Kids Count factbook, adults with less than a high school diploma are at particular risk of living in poverty

- *What do you see as, a policymaker, that you would determine as an intervention strategy to thwart this rise in Black girl suspensions?*

## **Who we are:**

*RICBW is a non-profit organization that enables African-American women to help address the diverse needs of their community through organizing programs, establishing networks, and developing leadership talent. The organization was founded on September 22, 2001 and was a chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women. In 2017, focusing more on advocacy for local issues affecting Rhode Island Black women and establishing a local brand, the chapter left the National organization and changed its name to Rhode Island Coalition of Black Women, Inc. Our mission is to cultivate, enrich, and empower Black women as advocates for viability, equality, and equity within the Black community in the areas of employment, education, health, and economic development*

## Resources:

<https://www.domesticworkers.org/status-black-women-united-states>  
[https://www.ncbcp.org/news/releases/5Black\\_Women\\_in\\_the\\_US\\_2016.pdf](https://www.ncbcp.org/news/releases/5Black_Women_in_the_US_2016.pdf)  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2018/03/05/black-women-looking-to-make-history-increase-their-numbers-in-elected-offices-in-2018/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.8d7c6d2ce4a5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2018/03/05/black-women-looking-to-make-history-increase-their-numbers-in-elected-offices-in-2018/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.8d7c6d2ce4a5)  
<http://sistersong.net/reproductive-justice/>  
<https://www.economicprogressri.org/index.php/2017/01/19/the-status-of-working-women-in-rhode-island-2017/>  
<https://iwpr.org/report-shows-best-worst-states-status-black-women-united-states/>  
<http://blackdemographics.com/population/black-state-population/>