

# PATHWAYS to OPPORTUNITY

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*Building Prosperity in Providence*



Update on the Recommendations of the  
Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force

September 2010

## POVERTY IN PROVIDENCE

Changes in the economy both nationally and in Rhode Island have led to high poverty rates in Providence. The challenges faced by low-income Providence residents affect the overall quality of life in the City and pose barriers to growth and economic development in Providence as well as all of Rhode Island. Many Providence residents lack the skills and education necessary to compete successfully in today's workforce, and a parent working full-time year-round at a low-wage job will not earn enough money to support a family.

Poverty is at the heart of many inter-related barriers faced by residents of Providence. Compared with higher-income people, those who live in poverty are less likely to receive needed health care, are more likely to live in unsafe or unhealthy housing, are more likely to live in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty, are more likely to attend low-performing public schools, are less likely to have the supports needed to finish high school and access higher education, and are less likely to have the networking connections fundamental to success in the labor market.

Between 2006 and 2008, approximately 41,000 Providence residents were living below the federal poverty threshold, making up 26% of the City's population, and 36% of children under age 18 in Providence lived in poor families. Poverty is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as having income below \$17,285 per year for a family of three and \$21,756 for a family of four.

## THE TASK FORCE

The *Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force* was established through an Executive Order and charged with developing and defining an agenda "to grow, retain and reclaim the middle class in Providence" by increasing the ability of low-income families in Providence to improve their economic status, and decreasing barriers to economic advancement facing families living in poverty in the City.

The Providence *Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force* built upon the work taking place nationally through the creation of U.S. Conference of Mayors Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force, formed in January 2006. The U.S. Conference of Mayors Task Force was created to provide a national voice on behalf of cities for the importance of addressing poverty, expanding opportunity, rewarding work, and rebuild-

ing the urban middle class. The City's Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force was featured at the U.S. Conference of Mayors winter meeting in 2008.

During the spring and summer of 2007, the Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force developed a set of recommendations that constitute an integrated strategy designed to reduce poverty and increase access to work and opportunity for residents of Providence.

## THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force recommendations focus on providing a range of opportunities to City residents, including opportunities to increase job skills, to work in jobs with career paths, to access the work supports that help low-wage earners meet their basic needs, or to increase financial protections and financial education so individuals keep more of what they earn. Finally, they are about making long-term investments so that poverty and lack of opportunity do not carry forward into future generations.

The final set of recommendations presented in this report focus on five aligned goals:

**Create opportunities for low-wage workers and job seekers to improve basic skills and to obtain quality jobs** that provide pathways for advancement.

**Connect youth to jobs and college** by providing opportunities for in-school and out-of-school youth to complete high school with the confidence, education and skills to succeed.

**Increase access to jobs with adequate wages and benefits and access to work support programs** for working adults and families. Work supports include child care subsidies, health insurance, SNAP Benefits (formerly Food Stamps) and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

**Reduce the high cost of being poor** by improving financial education, reducing predatory lending and other high-cost business practices and increasing access to basic banking services, such as checking accounts and loans.

**Prevent poverty in future generations** by providing access to early education and skills that give children the best start in life.

The full original Task Force Report (2007) can be found at: [http://www.providenceri.com/press/docs/Prosperity\\_in\\_providence\\_.pdf](http://www.providenceri.com/press/docs/Prosperity_in_providence_.pdf)

## Update on the Recommendations of the Providence Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force and Summary of the Pathways to Opportunity Work to Date

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**G**rowing out of the City of Providence's involvement with Making Connections Providence and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's interest in promoting city-level work to advance poverty-reduction strategies that incorporate the voice of residents, the Pathways to Opportunity Office was established to coordinate the implementation of the recommendations of the Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force and to coordinate a number of important, related initiatives including the Providence Re-Entry Initiative, and Making Connections Providence's Family Economic Success programs.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT facilitated the original Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force process and is now facilitating the Pathways to Opportunity Steering Committee as this work moves forward to improve the lives of children and families in Providence.

In this tight City budget climate, the Pathways to Opportunity Office is supported through philanthropic and federal funding rather than through the City budget. The Office works with local partners to attract new funding and to align related federal, state and philanthropic initiatives in the City.

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The following is an update on the efforts to improve economic opportunity and reduce poverty based on the recommendations of the Providence Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force, as of September 2010.

1-A

## Increase Access to Adult Education and Training Programs in Providence

In Spring 2009, the Pathways to Opportunity Office convened an Adult Pathways Workgroup that, through a series of community meetings, resulted in a white paper called Providence RISES: From Initiative to System that laid out a plan for building an adult education and workforce system to meet the needs of low skilled, low income residents in Providence. The core of **Providence RISES is integrated work-readiness training and contextualized adult basic education within specific high-demand sectors** (hospitality, advanced manufacturing, green jobs, construction and administration/IT).

The Providence RISES work influenced the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) and the Governor's Workforce Board (GWB) to commit approximately \$1 million and \$1.5 million, respectively, to fund contextualized literacy and workforce development in Rhode Island. Funding awards were announced in summer 2010.

The United Way of Rhode Island has provided funding to the Pathways Office to work with RIDE, the GWB, and the local workforce investment boards to provide leadership to the evolving effort and to deliver technical assistance to both the funders and the funded partners as these programs are implemented starting in summer 2010

Through the **Providence Full-Service Community Schools** (PFSCS) program, students and their families access a comprehensive set of services based in the schools, including **family literacy** programming. Families participate in classes at the elementary school that teach English as a

Second Language (ESL) while promoting family involvement in the school and allowing parents to practice literacy skills with children. By integrating these services with existing school systems and curriculum, children and families experience success and maximize learning. During the 2009-2010 school year, 111 parents participated in family literacy programs through the PFSCS. For more information on PFSCS, see the Related Work section at the end of this document.

Additionally, the City's **Community Development Block Grant** (CDBG) solicitation for proposals specifically highlighted the City's interest in funding workforce development initiatives and urged applicants to propose initiatives aligned with the RISES model. As a result of this targeted solicitation, the 2010-2011 CDBG budget provides nearly \$150,000 in funding to nine job training programs, many of which incorporate or build upon practices in the RISES model.

1-B

## Expand Sector-Based Career Pathways for Low-Skill, Low-Wage Workers

(sustain and expand existing initiatives and advocate for increased resources to address gaps in services)

**Stepping Up** is a partnership between local hospitals, labor unions, and community based organizations to move community members into jobs at local hospitals while also building the skills of incumbent workers.

The **Rhode Island Welcome Back Center** is a program based at Dorcas Place that helps to re-credential foreign-trained health care workers who immigrated here. Participants also receive assistance finding jobs as health care professionals.

As the new **Energy Training Partnership**, Building Futures and local Labor Unions received a \$3.7 million federal grant to provide 100 low-income people with pre-Apprenticeship training (including GED support), 600 people with Apprenticeship opportunities and 900 current Apprentices with Journeyman upgrades in

their industry. The majority of the pre-Apprenticeship program participants are Providence residents. Participants are being placed in construction industry and temporary construction positions.

The new **Providence Green Pathways out of Poverty Partnership (PGP3)** was developed using federal stimulus (ARRA) funding received by the City to create approximately 200 jobs as part of the U.S. Department of Labor's Pathways Out of Poverty competition. The PGP3 proposal incorporates the Providence RISES contextualized literacy program model.

Apeiron Institute and the City of Providence received funding from the U.S. Conference of Mayors/Walmart to provide **job training and employer network services around green jobs.**

1-C

## Improve Employment Opportunities for City Residents

(improve Providence Connects/First Source)

Monitoring and reporting for **Providence Connects/First Source** was improved, with 108 placements in FY 2008 and 90 in FY 2009. FY 2010 data will be available later in 2010. The City also created the First Source Employer Database to improve monitoring and entered into partnerships with Stepping Up and Groundworks Providence to provide job training services. The City is working with Building Futures to connect job seekers with opportunities in the construction trades and to improve connections with construction sector employers. The City also is in the

process of implementing IT and other reporting/monitoring upgrades to improve the effectiveness of the Providence Connects initiative.

**Jobs Now Providence** is a subsidized job creation program funded through TANF Stimulus (ARRA) funds and being administered through Providence-Cranston Workforce Solutions, the Providence Planning Department, and three state agencies (Department of Human Services, Department of Labor and Training and Department of Revenue).

## #2: Connect Youth to Jobs and Post-Secondary Education

2-A

### Provide Workplace Learning Opportunities to Providence Youth

(expand access to career development in after-school programs, career & tech courses, and other workforce development resources and supports for in-school and out-of-school youth)

Providence-Cranston Workforce Solutions received \$1.9 million in federal ARRA (stimulus) funding for **summer youth employment programs** in 2009. The funding enabled 732 youth to receive workforce training services and participate in paid employment programs. For 61% of these youth, this was their first work experience, and 85% said they would not have been working if not for the program. The City provided additional assistance for materials and supplies through Providence Connects.

The new **Providence Career and Technical Academy (PCTA)** was opened in fall 2009, with 379 students in grades nine through 12 enrolled in the 2009-2010 school year. PCTA offers technical education in nine fields, including: Automotive Technology; Construction Technology; Cosmetology; Culinary Arts and Hospitality; Electrical Science; Graphic Communications; Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning; Masonry; and Plumbing and Pipefitting.

In late spring 2010, Providence-Cranston Workforce Solutions transitioned the **Providence Youth Center** to two new locations in Providence, one at the PCTA and one downtown near Kennedy Plaza in order to better serve both in-school and out-of-school youth in Providence.

**The Hub**, the Providence After School Alliance's new high school initiative, aims to connect high school-aged youth with after-school programs, employment and internship opportunities, and

health and wellness resources, through a centrally located space, web tool, and youth-friendly transportation system.

Providence also received a \$650,000 grant to develop a program to serve out-of-school youth in the PCTA facility after school hours as part of the **Second School Day Initiative**, with a focus on IT and green jobs.

**Lifespan and the Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence** received funding from the **Rhode Island Foundation** to provide Providence youth with jobs and employment skills training during the summer of 2010.

2-B

## Assist Youth with the College Application and Enrollment Process

(increase information and supports for youth through a local college access partnership, expand access to youth development programs)

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The **Pathways to College Work Group**, a collaboration of local stakeholders working on college preparation and access issues met numerous times and developed a set of action steps for the Providence Public School Department and local community-based organizations doing college access work to increase the numbers of youth in Providence with access to college and to ensure that Providence students are ready to succeed in college.

Starting in the 2009-2010 school year, every Providence public high school offered at least two **Advanced Placement (AP) courses**.

**Nonprofit organizations that focus on youth development and college access** continue to play a critical role in connecting Providence youth to college. Organizations that work with Providence youth on college access include College Visions, Providence District-Wide Student Government, Young Voices, Youth in Action, Youth 4 Change Alliance, AS220, and the Swearer Center at Brown.

## #3: Make Work Pay

3-A

### Increase the Number of Providence Residents with Adequate Wages

Providence residents have gained employment through **Stepping Up**, the **Welcome Back Center** and **Jobs Now Providence** (See Section 1 for more information on these programs).

3-B

### Increase Access to Work Support Programs that Help Meet Basic Needs

(streamline benefits enrollment and outreach)

The **Pathways to Opportunity Work Support Work Group** merged with the **Rhode Island Modernization Steering Committee in 2010** in order to better tie benefits access work in Providence to the statewide efforts. Key Providence stakeholders are involved in the Modernization Steering Committee (including: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, the Poverty Institute, and the Pathways to Opportunity Office) and are working to ensure that the interests of Providence residents are included in the design and implementation of systems changes.

There are three subcommittees of the Modernization Steering Committee: (1) exploring how to make easy-to-understand information about the different programs that the five Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) agencies provide and program applications available on the EOHHS website; (2) streamlining access to the benefits that the Department of Human Services (DHS) provides to working families; and (3) examining the

process for accessing mental health benefits through the Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals (MHRH) and for youth as they transition from Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) services to MHRH services.

The **Providence Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)/VITA Campaign** was a success again in 2009. The City of Providence supported the 2009 EITC/VITA Campaign and helped broker a new partnership with H&R Block. With more than 2,200 filers served, the largest number to date and a 3% increase over 2008, 2009 was the most successful in the eight years of the Providence EITC/VITA Coalition. The Providence Resident Leadership Network initiated a Walker-Talker Campaign during tax season to help inform residents about the availability of tax preparation services. Through the EITC alone, \$1.1 million was returned to residents in the form of income tax credits and refunds. Numbers are forthcoming from the 2010 campaign.

The City partnered with John Hope Settlement House and United Way/211 to develop a **Family Economic Success Resource Guide** which was distributed to thousands of residents throughout the City in 2009 and again in 2010. Copies of the guide can be found at:

[http://www.bankonprovidence.org/  
Userfiles/file/Resource-Guide-2010.pdf](http://www.bankonprovidence.org/Userfiles/file/Resource-Guide-2010.pdf)

The development of Providence **Family Success Centers** was announced during Mayor Cicilline's 2010 State of the City address. These Centers are based on the Centers for Working Families model that offers a "one-stop" center for low-income residents to apply for benefits and access a variety of supports and information for workforce training and financial empowerment in a coordinated way. The City is working with LISC to implement the Centers. Planning took place during summer 2010 with implementation targeted for fall 2010.

## #4: Reduce the High Cost of Being Poor

4-A

### Create Affordable Financial Services for Low-Wage Residents

(partnership between the City and the financial services sector)

**Bank on Providence** was launched in May 2010. The City is partnering with all of the local banks and credit unions with a presence in Providence with a goal of opening 2,000 new accounts for low-income individuals and families over the next two years. Each bank has agreed to feature an account that is affordable and appropriate for those who are currently without bank accounts. The participating financial institutions also expanded the forms of ID acceptable for opening an account. Learn more at: [www.bankonprovidence.org](http://www.bankonprovidence.org)

The City of Providence was invited to join **Cities for Financial Empowerment** (CFE), a group of approximately a dozen cities that use their clout to advance the cause of economic empowerment in their cities. Through this group, the City has also been involved in supporting federal bank regulation legislation, including work on overdraft fees and the creation of a Consumer Financial Protection Agency. Read more about CFE at: [www.cfecoalition.org](http://www.cfecoalition.org).

## 4-B

### Reduce Predatory Lending and Other High-Cost Practices

(continue to monitor and address the impact of high foreclosure rates in the City, work with businesses to increase lower-cost alternatives in the City, advocate for municipal authority over or state regulation of lending businesses)

The City Council passed **two new ordinances to help reduce predatory lending practices in Providence.**

- The first ordinance requires that banks enter into mediation with homeowners prior to foreclosing on properties. Mediation must be conducted by a HUD approved Housing Councilor.
- The second ordinance requires proper notice to Tenants prior to foreclosure, while maintaining utility service.

The City of Providence is working in close partnership with the State Housing Commission to implement the **Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Initiative.** This effort provides financial counseling, support services, and short term (6-18 month) housing vouchers to people at

risk of becoming homeless. It is funded through ARRA and was designed, in part, to mitigate the impacts of the foreclosure crisis.

The City, through its partnership with Making Connections Providence, provided funding to West Elmwood Housing to provide **foreclosure counseling to home-based child care providers** who were being faced with either foreclosure or foreclosure-related eviction.

The City supported a **Foreclosure Scam Prevention Campaign** in 2010 to educate those facing foreclosure about potential scams.

**Cardi's Furniture and Olneyville Housing** partnered to make affordable financing for furniture available to low-income residents as an alternative to Rent-A-Centers in the Olneyville neighborhood.

## 4-C

### Increase Financial Education and Counseling

(home-ownership and other high-level topics, increase linguistic and culturally-appropriate courses, youth financial education)

The City of Providence is a partner along with John Hope Settlement House (Lead agency), West Elmwood Housing Development, Olneyville Housing, and Community Impact in the United Way of Rhode Islands' **Financial Stability Partnership.** The Partnership will receive approximately \$120,000 each year for the next three years to increase access to financial literacy and counseling for Providence residents, in addition to providing other services. These services will be tied to the Earned Income Tax

Credit (EITC)/VITA Campaign and Bank On Providence. These resources will also increase access to home ownership counseling and one-on-one financial counseling and help low income adults, youth and families avoid high-cost and predatory financial services.

The City was also awarded a \$20,000 **Dollarwise grant from the US Conference of Mayors** to help build the capacity of financial literacy providers in the City.

## #5: Prevent Poverty In Future Generations

5-A

### Provide Universal Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Programs

(universal Pre-K, child-care subsidies, address program quality)

The first state-funded Pre-K classes as part of the **Rhode Island Pre-K Demonstration Program** began in September 2009 in seven classrooms, three of which were in Providence. The Demonstration Program began its second year in September 2010 in the same locations. The National Institute for Early Education Research is conducting a rigorous evaluation of the Pre-K Demonstration Program's impact on children's school readiness.

**Funding for Pre-K was included in the state education funding formula** that was passed by the Rhode Island General Assembly in June 2010. This formula will be used to allocate state funds for education starting in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2012. The SFY 2011 budget includes level funding for state Pre-K at \$700,000 per year, and **state funding for Head Start** is \$800,000 per year. An additional \$300,000 in federal Title I funding through the Providence Public School District will be blended with state funding to support the three Pre-K classrooms in Providence.

The enacted FY 2011 budget maintains the current **eligibility for subsidized child care** to children in families who earn at or below 180% of the federal poverty level (\$32,958 for a family of 3). Legislation did not pass in the 2010 legislative session that would have allowed families currently enrolled in the program to remain eligible if and when their income grows up to 225% of FPL (\$41,198 for a family of 3). The **rates paid to child care providers** caring for children from low-income families were maintained during the 2010 legislative session.

As of August 2010, there are 65 programs participating in **BrightStars** (Rhode Island's child care quality rating and improvement system) and there are several pending applications. ARRA funding is being used to provide financial grants and incentives to programs to encourage participation in BrightStars and to help programs make quality improvements.

## Prevent Teen Pregnancy and Provide Intensive Support Services to Parenting Teens

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Rhode Island was awarded a 5-year Evidence-Based Home Visiting grant through the federal Administration for Children and Families in order to launch the evidence-based **Nurse Family Partnership (NFP)** program in Rhode Island. One hundred families in Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls and Cranston will be enrolled in the Nurse Family Partnership program for at-risk first-time parents, including teens. Policy and planning for the NFP initiative is managed by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT in partnership with the Department of Human Services, the Department of Children Youth and Families, the Department of Health and other community providers and stakeholders. The evaluation is being conducted by the Bradley/Hasbro Children's Research Center.

Through federal stimulus funding (ARRA), a new **Early Head Start** program opened at Meeting Street and Children's Friend expanded Early Head Start services to Pawtucket. Through this federal investment, 134 children and families will receive Early Head Start Services. Early Head Start is a comprehensive early childhood program serving low-income children birth to age 3, pregnant women and their families.

The Rhode Island Department of Human Services awarded funding for the **Youth Success** program to the Rhode Island Community Action Association to deliver services to pregnant and parenting teens under age 20 who are enrolled in Rhode Island Works (TANF cash assistance). Teens who have not completed high school or a GED program are required to participate. Providence teen parents are served by the Providence Community Action Program/ Elmwood Center and Family Service of Rhode Island.

## Related Work

### Providence Re-entry Initiative

The **Providence Re-Entry Initiative** (PRI) was established in 2008 to reduce recidivism and crime in the City. The initiative is coordinated by a steering committee chaired by Col. Dean Esserman and Pastor Charles Berkley and is comprised of approximately a dozen actively participating public and community based organizations.

The PRI has developed a Strategic Plan and is currently awaiting a decision on a pending \$1 million Second Chance Act grant designed to reduce recidivism among a cohort of 150 high-risk offenders returning to Police districts 2, 5 and 7 in the City.

In addition to its planning and grant-writing work, the PRI, with support from LISC, Amos House, and Making Connections, has established a District Council in Police District 2 (Elmwood and South Providence) to coordinate services to a targeted 50 returning prisoners by the end of the year. The Council started reviewing cases in summer 2010. A group of Advisory Committee members are participating in a professional development and leadership program focused on collaborative leadership and accountability for results.

### Providence After School Alliance (PASA)

The mission of the **Providence After School Alliance (PASA)** is to expand and improve after-school opportunities for the youth of Providence by organizing a system to ensure all youth have access to high-quality after-school programs and learning opportunities. PASA works to create full-day, year-round programming that integrates academic, social, and emotional development and physical health opportunities for every child, from first grade through high school, from when they wake up until they go to sleep. PASA supports the integration of Providence's public and private educational and after-school programs in a seamless way that avoids duplication and fragmentation, and supports every youth to the City's fullest capacity. During the 2009-2010 school year, PASA served 1,752 middle school students in Providence.

### Promise Neighborhoods

Family Service of Rhode Island led a group of stakeholders in the process to develop and apply for federal funding under the new **Promise Neighborhoods** initiative to create an implementation plan that would provide children and youth in Providence with comprehensive services from the cradle through college and career following the Harlem Children's Zone model.

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## Green and Healthy Homes

Providence was selected as one of 14 sites from across the country to be a part of the **Green and Healthy Homes Initiative**. The national Green and Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI) is implementing a cost-effective and integrated approach to housing interventions by combining federal and philanthropic investments in weatherization, energy efficiency, health and safety. GHHI replaces stand-alone programs with a comprehensive and seamless process that creates safer and more stable homes, improves the health of children and families and produces higher-quality green jobs. GHHI is setting a new standard for policies and practices to create more sustainable, affordable and healthier homes.

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## Providence Full-Service Community Schools

Brought together through Making Connections Providence and Dorcas Place, the stakeholders in **Providence Full Service Community Schools (FSCS)** are deeply invested in a place-based strategy designed to address literacy in a two-generational model. Based on community needs, this model has developed and gained significant traction among educators, community partners and families. Parents have been actively involved in parent outreach, engagement and education efforts. Early outcomes at participating South Providence elementary schools demonstrate that this model is working well. For example, 3rd grade reading proficiency rates at Bailey Elementary School rose from 27% to 56% in the initial years of the project. The approach includes: Out-of-School Time; Reading Intervention; Family Engagement; Family Literacy; Play and Learn; Family Service Care Coordination; Health and Fitness.

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## Providence Children and Youth Cabinet

The **Providence Children and Youth Cabinet** was formed in 2009 to improve coordination of services across agencies, increase collaboration, and foster better social, economic, behavioral, and physical outcomes for Providence's children and youth. The Cabinet includes a range of programs and stakeholders; has established a vision and set of strategies to achieve the vision, and is committed to improving the lives of children from cradle to career. Programs and services across the city have been mapped, and the Cabinet is now working to establish a common approach to using and sharing data across agencies so that data can be shared on an ongoing basis to support individual children and youth, as well as to evaluate program outcomes and re-engineer when necessary to improve the lives of children and youth. The cabinet is working towards an integrated data system that bridges academic and non-academic data while fully safeguarding information for children.

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## LISC Sustainable Communities

Local Initiatives Support Corporation's (LISC) works with community partners to revitalize under-served neighborhoods in Providence. The **Sustainable Communities** initiative supports the development of physical improvements, safer streets, increased property values and more engaged residents by creating opportunities for residents of those communities to raise their incomes, build assets and gain access to quality education, health care, jobs, services and recreational amenities.

## PROVIDENCE PATHWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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*City of Providence, Chair*

**Jennifer Davis-Allison**

*Making Connections Providence*

**Chace Baptista**

*Young Voices*

**Garry Bliss**

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**Elizabeth Burke Bryant**

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For more information about the Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force and the Pathways to Opportunity initiative, please contact the Providence Department of Planning and Development at (401) 351-4300.