

RHODE ISLAND



Poor People's Campaign, Rhode Island
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September 18, 2022

Public Utilities Commission
89 Jefferson Boulevard, Warwick, RI 02888

Re: RI Energy rate change

Dear Commissioners:

This letter is on behalf of Poor People's Campaign of Rhode Island. We are a network of individuals, congregations and community organizations committed to lifting up those most affected by systemic racism, poverty and inequality, the war economy, and ecological devastation.

The Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission (PUC) must hold public hearings in this matter in each of Rhode Island's counties. The hearings must be accessible to all and provide, at a minimum, Spanish language translation. This is one of our purposes in writing, but there is more.

At the September 16, 2022, public meeting about the proposed utility rate hikes, Dr. Nithin Paul, a medical doctor, mentioned that the the PUC makes decisions without adequately studying their impact on Rhode Islanders. To partially make up for this flaw in the decision process, we are writing to provide the following information.

The national Poor People's Campaign has documented the dire situation in Rhode Island, where in 2018, **before the pandemic**, 36% of people were poor or low-income; that is a total of 370 thousand residents. At the time, this included 47% of Rhode Island children (99 thousand), 40% of women (210 thousand), 60% of Black people (40 thousand), 70% of Latino people (110 thousand), and 30% of White people (220 thousand).¹

Another matter that the Poor People's Campaign has thoroughly researched and keeps stressing is that U.S. poverty cut-offs are too low. This applies federally, but those outdated, inadequate metrics leave their mark at the state level. Rhode Island is no exception.

This problem applies to rent, it applies to tuition, and obviously it applies to food, shelter, and utilities. Please see the attached document for further details.

We note that the information mentioned above predates COVID-19, which, together with the war in Ukraine, has made a bad situation far worse. As to the latter we would like to draw your attention to a report entitled *Mapping the Intersections of Poverty, Race and COVID-19*.² The following is a quote from the introduction of this report. We focus your attention on this paragraph, because it specifically addresses the interlocking injustices mentioned above, namely systemic racism, and inequality and poverty:

People over the age of 65 experienced the greatest loss of life, comprising 75% of COVID-

¹<https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/PPC-state-fact-sheet-Rhode-Island.pdf>

19 deaths in the US - or -1 in 100 older Americans died, compared to 1 in 1,400 people under the age of 65 (Bosman et al. 2021). While the greatest number of deaths have been among non-Hispanic white people, the rates of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths have been higher among people of color: American Indian or Alaska Natives are 3.1 times more likely to be hospitalized, Black or African Americans are 2.5 times more likely to be hospitalized and 1.7 times more likely to die, and Hispanic or Latino persons are 1.5 times more likely to get COVID and 2.3 times more likely to be hospitalized (CDC, 2022).

Before you vote on the proposed utility price increases, we would like you to consider what the Talmud said: "To save one life, it is as if you had saved the world." You will be in a position to save more than one life.

Yours sincerely, The Rhode Island
Poor People's Campaign: A National
Call for Moral Revival

Poverty Line Based on 1950s Ideas and Data

The measure assumes “a careful shopper, a skillful cook, and a good manager who will prepare all the family’s meals at home.”
--Mollie Orshansky (1963)



Mollie Orshansky, a food economist who worked in the federal government, designed the poverty measure in the early 1960s. She came to view the measure as inadequate not long after.

U.S. Poverty Guidelines are Too Low

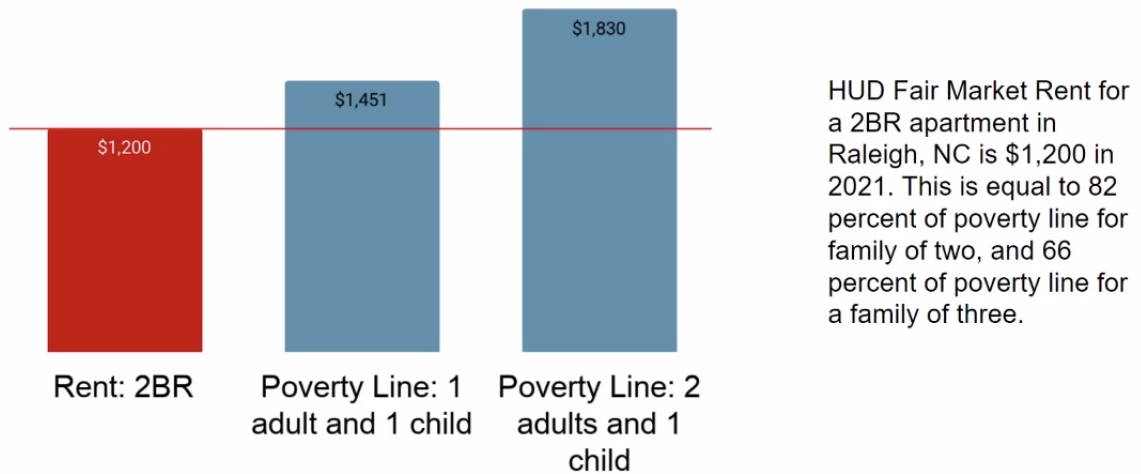
\$12,880
(\$1,073/mo)

For 1st person in a family.

\$4,540
(\$378/mo)

For each additional person.

Rent for a Basic Apartment Costs More than Half of Poverty Line



Poverty Line Hasn't Kept Up with Rent

1983: 51%

2021: 66%

2 BR rent (HUD FMR for Raleigh, NC MSA)
as percentage of poverty line for 3-person family.

Poverty Line Hasn't Kept Up with Post-Secondary Costs

Average cost of tuition at a public college as a percentage of amount added to poverty line for one child (\$1,680 in 1983 and \$4,320 in 2018).

	Public, 2 Year	Public, 4 Year
1983	31%	68%
2018	77%	213%