



# RI NOW 2011

November 30, 2011

RI NOW's mission is to take action to bring women into full participation in all aspects of public and private life without experiencing barriers based on gender. 2011 was filled with actions designed to educate and activate RI NOW's members and allies on a full range of issues through education/outreach, legislative action and coalition work. This 2011 Annual Report provides some highlights of the year.



- Hosted a Legislative Wrap Party on June 29 to brief members and friends on the results of the 2011 legislative session
- Participated in Love Your Body Day activities on the Brown University Campus on October 19
- Along with Planned Parenthood, Ocean State Action, and the Women's Health and Education Fund, hosted a "Cocktails for Choice" event on November 3 that drew more than 70 people in support of choice
- Held its Annual Meeting on November 30 featuring State Representatives Teresa Tanzi and Maria Cimini on the subject of Gender and Politics in Rhode Island
- Will be co-hosting an event on December 8 with The Hive Feminist Archive in an effort to bring together the feminist art community with other feminist activists.

## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

In 2011, RI NOW increased awareness and engagement on a wide array of issues affecting women in our state. In addition to regular monthly e-newsletters, periodic action alerts, and facebook posts, RI NOW:

- Mobilized members and friends to Stand With Planned Parenthood at a rally on March 10
- Participated in the Women's Health and Education Fund's (WHEF's) annual bowl-a-thon which raised more than \$20,000 to fund reproductive health care services for low income women
- Hosted an Equal Pay Day happy hour on April 12
- Hosted a State House tour on April 14 accompanied by former RI NOW board member and current State Representative Teresa Tanzi
- Co-hosted an event with WHEF to raise awareness regarding abortion care in health insurance on May 19



## LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

### RI WORKS

RI NOW lobbied in support of an amendment to the RI Works program that adjusts the work requirement to enable single parents in the program to participate in job-training, education programs, and other work-readiness activities to increase their employability. This amendment to the program, which was included in the budget bill, will go a long way in helping women to achieve economic self-sufficiency. RI NOW applauds Representative Cimini for her leadership on this issue.

## MARRIAGE EQUALITY

2011 was a disappointing year for Marriage Equality in Rhode Island. Speaker Gordon Fox declared Marriage Equality dead during the 2011 legislative session, and pushed for civil union legislation instead. A last-minute amendment on the house floor was passed to include a very damaging religious exemption, which would essentially allow religious institutions, and their affiliates, to discriminate with impunity. RI NOW will continue to work with Marriage Equality Rhode Island (MERI) to achieve full marriage equality in this state and to undo the deleterious effects of the civil union legislation.



## REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND JUSTICE

In 2011, RI NOW successfully continued the fight against numerous anti-choice bills that would chip away at a woman's full reproductive rights. In addition, RI NOW lobbied against efforts to hijack the health insurance exchange bill by including abortion language that would effectively prevent abortion coverage through the exchange. Fortunately, the bill as amended died in the General Assembly and the Governor has since issued an executive order to create the health care exchange – without the damaging anti-abortion language. RI NOW anticipates that the fight is not over on this issue, and we will remain vigilant during the 2012 session.

RI NOW celebrated the passage of the Healthy Pregnancies for Incarcerated Women Act, which was signed into law by Governor Chafee. This law will provide restrictions on the physical restraint of pregnant prisoners. This has been a high priority bill for RI NOW, and we are very pleased to have helped to ensure its passage.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

RI NOW advocated in support of the successful Cyberstalking Bill. This new law allows the crimes of cyberstalking and cyberharrasment to be prosecuted as domestic violence offenses,

thus ensuring that abusers will be held accountable for their online actions. RI NOW also supported the Anti-Strangulation Bill that would make strangulation or choking a felony. Research has shown that a victim of domestic violence who has been strangled or choked at some point in their relationship is nine times more likely to be murdered. Unfortunately, the General Assembly came to a close before the house and senate versions could be reconciled. This bill will be a top priority for next year.

## MEMBERSHIP

RI NOW is pleased to have added 43 new members during 2011. With 332 dues paying members, 180 friends on facebook, and close to 500 subscribers to the RI NOW listserve, RI NOW's community of members and allies remains strong. Goals for 2012 include converting supporters into dues-paying members, and expanding our circle of friends through social media and grassroots activism.

## COALITION WORK

RI NOW is able to increase its level of effectiveness by working in coalition with other organizations equally committed to improving the status of women and girls in our state. RI NOW has a seat on the Board of Directors of Ocean State Action, a progressive coalition of community organizations, labor unions, women's organizations, and environmental groups that work together to advance progressive social change. RI NOW also serves on the Steering Committee of Healthy Kids RI, a grassroots advocacy coalition that promotes comprehensive sex education. In addition, it is with gratitude that we also recognize the following coalition partners: Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, The Poverty Institute, the American Civil Liberties Union, the RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and WHEF, among others.



*RI NOW President Carolyn Mark (center) receives YWCA Women of Achievement Award. Photo courtesy of YWCA Northern RI.*