

# PRELIMINARY

## RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island ranks 49th among the states in the number of local governments, with 118 as of June 2002.

### COUNTY GOVERNMENTS (0)

Counties in Rhode Island represent geographic state subdivisions that are generally intended for judicial administration purposes. They do not operate under formal governmental structures, and are not counted as separate governments for census purposes.

### SUBCOUNTY GENERAL PURPOSE GOVERNMENTS (39)

There are 39 subcounty general purpose governments in Rhode Island. Subcounty governments within the state include both cities and towns. State code refers to cities and towns as "municipalities". Census, however, defines municipalities as only cities. Towns constitute their own subcounty class for census purposes. Regardless of the terminology used, both cities and towns within Rhode Island are distinguished primarily by the historical circumstances surrounding their incorporation. Both subcounty general purpose governmental types exercise similar powers and functions.

#### Municipal Governments (8)

Cities in Rhode Island are established by special act. They exist outside the area of any town. In addition to the usual functions performed by cities, they also provide for other services that are commonly assigned to county governments in other states. City governing bodies are known as "city councils." According to Census 2000 data, the city of Providence is the largest municipal jurisdiction within this state, representing a population of 173,618. The smallest municipal jurisdiction is Central Falls, which administers to 18,928 people.

#### Town or Township Governments (31)

Although towns are counted and classified as a

separate forms of subcounty governments, their legal powers are generally similar to cities.

Except for areas within the legal boundaries of cities, the entire area of the state is encompassed by town form of government. The governing body of a town is known as the "town council." Census 2000 population data indicated that the most populous town within the state is Coventry (33,668 people). The least populous town jurisdiction is New Shoreham (1,010 people)

### PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS (36)

#### School District Governments (4)

When compared to other school systems within the state, only the regional school districts of Rhode Island are counted as separate governments in census statistics. Regional school districts are created to operate all schools and education services such as: elementary and secondary schools, vocational and technical schools, community colleges, and any other school as prescribed by the state board of regents for elementary and secondary education. A majority of voters in participating cities and towns vote to create regional school districts. The regional school district school committee serves as the governing body of each district. Among a plethora of legal powers enjoyed by these governmental agencies, regional school districts may issue bonds and determine their own fiscal requirements as defined by their constituent cities and towns.

#### Dependent Public School Systems (32)

Rhode Island statutes provide for the following types of dependent public school systems:

Systems dependent on the state government (1):

Central Falls School District

Systems dependent on municipal governments (7):

City school systems

Systems dependent on town governments (24):

Town school systems

A 1991 law authorized the state to take control of the financially troubled Central Falls School System. The district is governed by a review commission composed primarily of state

officials.

The seven city and 24 town school systems in Rhode Island are not counted as separate governments in census statistics, but are classified as dependent agencies of the city and town governments. While these school systems are administered by elected boards, their fiscal requirements are determined and met by the sponsoring cities or towns. School “districts” within the city of Providence are geographical subdivisions of the city for the purpose of electing members of the Providence School Committee.

### **Other Educational Activities**

Collaborative programs are created by special acts of the legislature to provide special education, and other services to member school systems. They are governed by boards composed of representatives derived from the participating school systems. Activities associated with these programs are classified as dependent activities of the administering school systems, and are not counted as separate governments for census purposes.

### **SPECIAL DISTRICT GOVERNMENTS (75)**

Rhode Island statutes authorize the creation of a variety of special districts or authorities that are counted as governments. These are discussed in detail below.

#### **Conservation Districts**

Soil and water conservation districts are established by the state conservation committee by petition of the land owners. A board, appointed by the state conservation committee, governs each district. Contributions to the district may be required of the land owners within a district. Contributions from state government, federal government, and from private contributors may be accepted as well.

#### **Fire and Lighting Districts**

Rhode Island has several different types of fire districts. Most are single function, performing only the fire and rescue function. There are, however, some districts which also supply water and/or lighting. Regardless of the extent of their functions, these districts are established by special acts after local referendum. Generally,

officers governing these districts are elected at annual meetings of the voters. The districts may issue bonds, fix charges for the sale of water and/or electricity, and levy taxes upon approval of the voters.

### **Housing Authorities**

Housing authorities are created by city or town governments after a petition is made by at least 25 voter / residents and a public hearing is held. A board of commissioners governs each housing authority. The commissioners are appointed by the mayor or town council. Among other administrative powers, housing authorities may issue bonds, accept grants, and fix rents and charges for their housing projects.

### **Pawtuxet River Authority**

Situated within the jurisdictions of the towns of Coventry, West Warwick, and Scituate, and the cities of Warwick and Cranston, this authority was authorized by special act to provide sewerage and waste disposal facilities. A board of 15 members, which are appointed by the mayors or the presidents of the town councils of the cities and towns served, governs the authority. The authority may fix rates and charges for services it provides.

### **Water and Sewer Authorities (Special Acts)**

Bristol County Water Authority was authorized by a special act subject to local referendum. The governing body consists of three members each from the towns of Barrington, Bristol, and Warren. Board members are appointed by the member town councils. The authority may fix and collect charges and issue revenue bonds.

Kent County Water District was created by a special act. The governing body consists of one member each from the towns of East Greenwich, West Warwick, and Coventry, and the city of Warwick, appointed by the town or city council. An additional member is selected from the town or city having the greatest number of water users within the district. The authority may issue bonds and establish charges for the sale of water.

### **SUBORDINATE AGENCIES AND AREAS**

Shown below are various governmental designations in Rhode Island that have certain

characteristics of governmental units but that are classified in census statistics as subordinate agencies of the state or local governments and are not counted as separate governments. Legal provisions for some of the larger of these are discussed below (see “Public School Systems,” above, regarding educational agencies of this nature).

**Building authorities and corporations (state).**

The Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation and the Rhode Island Industrial-Recreational Building Authority were created by special acts to provide buildings for the purposes outlined by state statutes. Similar legal provisions apply to each agency. Their governing bodies are appointed by the Governor. These authorities may fix rentals and charges for facilities, accept loans and grants, and issue revenue bonds.

**Redevelopment agencies (city and town).**

These agencies are created by the legislative body of a city or town, and virtually exist in each community. A board, appointed by the mayor or the president of the town council, governs each agency. A redevelopment agency receives appropriations from the sponsoring city or town, may charge rentals, accept Federal or state financial assistance, and issue bonds. The sponsoring government may issue bonds for redevelopment purposes.

**Rhode Island Airport Corporation (state).**

This entity, formed by executive order in December of 1992, is a semiautonomous subsidiary of the Rhode Island Port Authority and Economic Development Corporation. It was created to operate and maintain the state airport at Warwick and any other airports constructed or operated by the state. Powers of the corporation are vested in a board of 7 members. Six of those board members are appointed by the Governor. The seventh board member is appointed by the mayor of the city of Warwick. Revenue bonds may be issued by the parent government, to be repaid from airport revenues.

**Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation (state).**

This corporation was created by special act to provide mortgage credit for low and moderate income housing and for health care facilities. The corporation board consists of seven commissioners, four of whom are appointed by the Governor with the consent of the senate, plus the director of business

regulation, the director of community affairs, and the state treasurer, who serve in an ex officio capacity. The corporation may receive grants and contributions, fix rates and charges, and issue revenue bonds.

**Rhode Island Industrial Facilities**

**Corporation (state).** This corporation was established by special act to finance industrial and pollution control facilities. A board of directors appointed by the Governor governs the corporation. The state director of economic development, ex officio, serves as chief executive officer of the corporation. The corporation may charge rentals in connection with its projects and may issue revenue bonds.

**Rhode Island Port Authority and Economic Development Corporation (state).**

This corporation was established by special act to finance the construction of industrial, commercial, and port facilities. A board of directors, consisting of the members of the State Economic Development Council, governs the corporation. The corporation may receive appropriations; fix rents, fees, tolls, and charges; and issue revenue bonds.

**Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (state).**

This authority was established by special act to operate transit systems in the state. The authority board consists of seven members, one a member of the senate (ex officio) appointed by the majority leader of the senate, one a member of the house of representatives (ex officio) appointed by the speaker of the house, four appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the senate, and the director of the department of transportation (ex officio). The authority may accept grants, fix fares and charges, and issue revenue bonds.

**Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority**

**(state).** This corporation was created by special act. Its functions are performed by the director of the department of transportation. The authority may issue revenue bonds and fix and collect tolls.

**Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation**

**(state).** This corporation, formerly named Rhode Island Solid Waste Management Corporation, was created by act of the General Assembly to finance solid waste disposal and resource recovery facilities. A board of nine commissioners, including five appointed by the

Governor, two by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, one by the senate majority leader, and the director of administration (ex officio), governs the corporation. The corporation may fix rates and fees, receive grants and contributions, and issue revenue bonds.

Other examples include:

#### **State**

Convention Center Authority  
Narragansett Bay Water Quality Management District  
Newport County Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Rhode Island Clean Water Protection Finance Authority  
Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Authority  
Rhode Island Public Telecommunications Authority  
Rhode Island Student Loan Authority  
Rhode Island Water Resources Board  
Rhode Island Public Rail Corporation  
Mount Hope Bridge Authority

#### **Municipal**

Conservation commissions  
Drainage districts  
Forest and park commissions

Highway districts  
Mosquito abatement districts  
Municipal public buildings authorities  
Parking commissions  
Providence Civic Center Authority  
Special development districts  
Wastewater management districts  
Water authorities

#### **Town**

Bristol Harbor Development Commission  
Conservation commissions  
Drainage districts  
Forest and park commissions  
Highway districts  
Jamestown Water Front Authority  
Middletown Water Front and Water Resources Authority  
Mosquito abatement districts  
Municipal public buildings authorities  
Portsmouth Sewer Authority  
Waste water management districts  
Water authorities

Rhode Island laws also provide for various types of local areas for election purposes and administration of justice.