

## **RHODE ISLAND**

Rhode Island ranks 49th among the states in the number of local governments, with 134 as of October 2007.

### **COUNTY GOVERNMENTS (0)**

In Rhode Island, counties are geographic subdivisions for the judicial administration of the state. They have no associated governmental structure and are not counted as governments for census purposes.

### **SUBCOUNTY GENERAL PURPOSE GOVERNMENTS (39)**

The subcounty general purpose governments in Rhode Island consist of municipal (city) governments and town governments. These two types of governments are distinguished primarily by the historical circumstances surrounding their incorporation. In Rhode Island, cities and towns have similar powers and perform similar functions.

#### **Municipal Governments (8)**

The term "municipality," as defined for census statistics on governments, applies only to the cities in Rhode Island. Towns, which are treated as municipalities in Rhode Island statutes, are counted for census purposes as town rather than municipal governments (see below). Cities in Rhode Island are established by special act and exist outside the area of any town. In addition to the usual city functions, Rhode Island cities also provide services commonly assigned in other states to county governments.

#### **Town or Township Governments (31)**

Although not differing in legally authorized powers from cities, units in Rhode Island designated as "towns" are counted in census statistics as a separate type of government.

The entire area of the state is encompassed by town government except for areas within the boundaries of cities. Rhode Island towns perform services that in other states are

commonly associated with county and city governments. Town governing bodies are known as town councils. All taxes must be approved by the town meetings.

### **PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS (36)**

#### **School District Governments (4)**

Only the regional school districts in Rhode Island are counted as governments in census statistics. The selection of the school committee for each of these school districts is determined by a meeting of the participating cities and towns. A regional school district may issue bonds and determine its own fiscal requirements, which are met by the 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:  
Central Falls School District

Systems dependent on municipal governments:  
City school systems

Systems dependent on town governments:  
Town school systems

The Central Falls School System is governed by a board of trustees appointed by the state board of regents for elementary and secondary education from nominations made by the commissioner of elementary and secondary education. The board appoints a superintendent to manage and operate the school.

The city and 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, called "school committees," their fiscal

requirements are determined and met by the sponsoring cities or towns.

### **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 (91)**

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.

#### **Capital Center Commission**

This commission was created by special act. It provides parking, transportation, streets, pedestrian malls, and the like within a special development district in the city of Providence. The commission consists of four members appointed by the Governor, four appointed by the mayor of Providence, four by the chair of the Providence Foundation, and one jointly by the aforementioned three officers, plus the chair of the corporations committee of the state senate, the chair of the finance committee of Providence's city council, and the chair of the local committee on urban redevelopment renewal. The committee may charge special assessments with the approval of property owners and may receive revenue from leases, sales, and loans. The commission may issue bonds after state approval and, in some cases, voter approval.

#### **Conservation Districts**

Soil and water conservation districts are established by the state conservation committee upon petition of land owners. A

board, consisting of three members appointed by the state conservation committee and two members elected by landowners, 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.

#### **Convention and Visitors' Bureaus**

Two bureaus have been created by special act: the Newport County Convention and Visitors' Bureau and the Greater Providence-Warwick Convention and Visitors' Bureau. The former is governed by a board consisting of appointees by local governments; the latter also includes state appointees. The bureaus are funded by a statutorily set hotel tax.

#### **Dam Management Districts**

These districts are created upon passage of an ordinance by one or more cities and/or towns. The boundaries of the districts and the manner of governance are specified in the creating ordinance. The districts may set fees, rates, and charges.

Dam management districts governed by the creating government ex officio are not counted as separate governments. See "Subordinate Agencies and Areas," below.

#### **East Providence Special Development District Commission**

This commission was created by special act. It serves a special development district in East Providence, providing economic development for a waterfront area. The 19-member commission consists of local and state appointees plus city and state officials serving in an ex officio capacity. The commission may fix fees, rates, rents, assessments, and other charges.

#### **Fire, Fire and Water, and Fire and Lighting Districts (Special Acts)**

These districts, which typically furnish fire protection, water supply, or lighting but may

also furnish other services such as street or beach maintenance, electric power, or garbage removal, are established by special acts with substantially uniform provisions. A referendum may be required. The districts are governed by officers elected at an annual meeting of the voters. The Exeter Fire District's board also includes members appointed by private entities. For all fire districts, either the board sets taxes or the electors order taxes. Some fire districts may issue bonds or fix charges for the sale of water. Voter approval may be required for the levy of taxes or for the district budget.

### **Housing Authorities**

Housing authorities are created by the city or town council upon petition of residents and after hearing. A board of commissioners appointed by the mayor or town council governs each district. Housing authorities may issue bonds and fix rents and charges.

### **Pascoag Utility District**

This district was created in 2001 by special act to provide electricity and water. A board of seven popularly elected commissioners governs the district. The district may fix rates and issue bonds.

### **Pawtuxet River Authority**

This authority was authorized by special act to provide sewerage and waste disposal facilities. A board of 15 members, 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.

### **Water Authorities - County (Special Acts)**

The 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.

The Kent County Water Authority was created by 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.

### **Water Authorities, Commissions, and Districts - Town (Special Acts)**

These districts are established by special acts to serve all or part of a town or towns. Establishment of the Chopmist Water District also required voter petition and vote of the town council. The districts are governed by boards of directors that may be elected or may be appointed by the town administrator. The districts may fix fees, rates, rents, and other charges and may issue bonds. For some districts, the voters may set and authorize taxes. Some districts may levy ad valorem property taxes, which may require voter approval.

## **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 and issue revenue bonds.

**Narragansett Bay Commission (state).** This commission was created in 1980 by a special legislative act. The commission operates water treatment plants. The commission is governed by gubernatorial appointees and appointees of the municipalities of Central Falls, Cumberland, East Providence, Johnston, Providence, North Providence, Pawtucket, and Lincoln. The commission may set rates and issue bonds.

**Rhode Island Airport Corporation (state).** This entity, formed by executive order in December of 1992, is a semi-autonomous subsidiary of the Rhode Island 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 seven members of which six are appointed by the Governor and one is appointed by the mayor of the city of Warwick. The corporation may fix rates and charges. The state economic development corporation may issue bonds on behalf of the corporation.

**Rhode Island 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 Governor and eight members appointed by the Governor, governs the corporation. The corporation may fix rents, fees, tolls, and charges and may issue revenue bonds. This entity was formerly known as the Rhode Island Port Authority and Economic Development Corporation.

**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 regulations, the director of administration, and

the state treasurer, who serve in an ex officio capacity. The corporation may 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 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 appointed by the president of the senate, one a member of the house of representatives appointed by the speaker of the house, four appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the senate, plus the director of the department of transportation. The authority may fix fares and charges and issue revenue bonds.

**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 members of the house of representatives appointed by the speaker of the house, one member of the senate appointed by the president of the senate, plus the director of administration, governs the corporation. The corporation may fix rates and fees and issue revenue bonds.

**Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority (state).** This corporation was created by special act. The authority is governed by a board consisting of four members appointed by the Governor plus the director of transportation. The authority may issue

revenue bonds and fix and collect tolls.

Other examples include:

### **State**<sup>1</sup>

Blackstone Valley Sewer District  
Capital Center Commission  
Quonset Development Corporation  
Regional tourism districts  
Rhode Island Clean Water Finance Agency  
(formerly the Rhode Island Clean Water  
Protection Finance Authority)  
Rhode Island Commission for National and  
Community Service (dba Rhode Island Service  
Alliance)  
Rhode Island Convention Center Authority  
Rhode Island Depositors Economic Protection  
Corporation  
Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance  
Authority  
Rhode Island Public Rail Corporation  
Rhode Island Public Telecommunications  
Authority  
Rhode Island Refunding Bond Authority  
Rhode Island Student Loan Authority  
Rhode Island Water Resources Board  
Tobacco Settlement Financing Corporation  
University of Rhode Island Research  
Corporation

### **Municipal**

Conservation commissions (city)  
Dam management districts with ex officio  
boards (city)  
District management authorities  
Downcity Tax District  
Drainage districts (city) (special acts)  
Mosquito abatement districts (city)  
Municipal detention facility corporations (city)  
Municipal land trusts (special acts)  
Municipal public buildings authorities (city)  
Parking commissions  
Providence Civic Center Authority  
Providence Public Building Authority  
Redevelopment agencies (city)  
Special development districts  
Stormwater management districts (city)

Warwick Sewer Authority  
Waste water management districts (city)  
Water supply boards (special acts)

### **Town**

Block Island Housing Board  
Burrillville Sewer Authority  
Conservation commissions (town)  
Coventry Sewer Authority  
Dam management districts with ex officio  
boards (town)  
Drainage districts (town) (special acts)  
Forest and park commissions  
Highway districts  
Hopkinton Economic Commission  
Land trusts (special acts)  
Lincoln Water Commission (1955 special act)  
Middletown Sewer Commission  
Mosquito abatement districts (town)  
Municipal detention facility corporations (town)  
Municipal public buildings authorities (town)  
Portsmouth Sewer Authority  
Redevelopment agencies (town)  
Smithfield Sewer Authority  
Stormwater management districts (town)  
Waste water management districts (town)  
Water supply boards (special acts)  
West Warwick Sewer Commission  
Westerly Downtown Center Special Services  
District

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

1. The Narragansett Bay Water Quality Management District was succeeded by the Narragansett Bay Commission. Legislation authorizing the Mount Hope Bridge Authority was repealed in 2006. The Newport County Convention and Visitors Bureau, classified as a state dependent agency in previous censuses, was reclassified as a special district for the 2007 census.