According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Rhode Island women working full-time earned a median weekly wage of $951 in 2020. This was 85.5 percent of what full-time working males earned that year - the second highest earnings ratio in New England behind Connecticut (97.0%) and the tenth highest in the country. Over the past twenty-three, Rhode Island has seen its female-to-male earnings ratio grow from a low of 71.2 percent in 1998 to a high of 87.1 percent in 2017. This past year, Rhode Island posted an increase of 1.9 percentage points, increasing from 83.6 percent in 2019 to 85.5 percent in 2020.

Regionally, Maine (76.6%) reported the largest earnings differential between women and men. Connecticut (97.0%) had the smallest differential between men’s and women’s earnings in 2020, followed by Rhode Island (85.5%), Vermont (83.7%), New Hampshire (82.5%) and Massachusetts (82.2%). Throughout the country, female-to-male earnings ratios ranged from a high of 97.0 percent in Connecticut to just 72.7 percent in Utah. Nationwide, women earned 82.3 percent of what men did in 2020. Maine (76.6%) and Massachusetts (82.2%) were the only New England states to report earnings ratios below the national average. The reasons for these earnings differentials between women and men vary. Although job discrimination is most often cited as the main reason women earn less than men, female worker earnings can also be impacted by breaks in or changes to their labor force participation (i.e. due to family responsibilities) and occupational mix due to physical differences between the sexes.

The earnings ratio between Ocean State women and men working full-time has dropped slightly after peaking in 2017. Whereas Rhode Island women had earned 71.2 percent of what men did in 1998, the ratio had improved to 87.1 percent in 2017. Rhode Island is currently down 1.6 percentage points from the 2017 peak, yet is up 1.9 percentage points over the year. This increase was the twenty-second largest reported in the nation. Connecticut (+11.4 percentage points) reported the largest increase in the nation, followed by Arizona (+8.0 percentage points) and New Mexico (+7.0 percentage points). The United States as a whole increased by 0.8 percentage points. Just eighteen states and the District of Columbia saw their earnings ratio decrease, with Colorado (-8.3 percentage points) decreasing the most, followed by Hawaii (-5.7 percentage points).

Between 1998 and 2020, Rhode Island women experienced a much faster growth in median weekly earnings than men. In 1998, females earned a median weekly wage of $455 compared to $638 earned by males. By 2020, women’s median weekly earnings had increased by 109.0 percent (+$496) to $951. In contrast, the median weekly earnings of Ocean State males rose to $1,112, a 74.3 percent (+$474) increase. In Rhode Island, women ($951) in 2020 earn less than men did in 2017 ($956).
At $951, women in the Ocean State earned the third lowest median weekly earnings total in the region in 2020. Women in Connecticut earned the highest weekly earnings at $1,166, followed by Massachusetts ($1,115) and New Hampshire ($954). Regionally, only Vermont ($886) and Maine ($794) had lower weekly median earnings for women than both Rhode Island ($951) and the nation ($891).

The median weekly earnings of Ocean State women increased by 7.6 percent (+$67) between 2019 and 2020. In 2020, Rhode Island men saw their median weekly earnings increase by 5.2 percent (+$55). In New England, Connecticut (+20.0%) and Massachusetts (+10.2%) posted the largest percentage growth in women’s median weekly earnings from 2019 to 2020. Nationally, the median weekly earnings of women increased by 8.5 percent (+$70), from $821 in 2019 to $891 in 2020. Of all states, Connecticut posted the largest percentage increase in women’s earnings (+20.0%) over the year while Vermont had the smallest percentage gain (+0.8%).

In 2020, women workers in Rhode Island earned the 13th highest median weekly wage ($951) in the United States. Women’s median weekly earnings ranged from a high of $1,506 in the District of Columbia to a low of $675 in Mississippi.