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## For Immediate Release

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## United Way of Rhode Island Announces \$1 Million Community Impact Investment to Help Struggling Neighbors Avert Basic Needs Crisis

**Providence, R.I.** (January 19, 2012) As a result of the recession that has tightened its grip on Rhode Island, there are crises brewing in every community, as tens of thousands of our neighbors struggle to meet their basic needs. Decreased public and private resources, coupled with non-profit service providers facing unprecedented need, have weakened the state's social safety net and pushed families to the brink. This perfect storm of increased need and diminishing resources severely threatens the well-being of our communities.

In response, United Way of Rhode Island (UWRI) is announcing a community impact investment of \$1 million over the next two years to provide assistance to help our neighbors weather the storm of uncertainty in meeting their basic needs.

"The stories of need in our community are dire, and all too easy to understand in light of the economic recession that has plagued the state for more than four years," said Anthony Maione, president & CEO, United Way of Rhode Island. "This financial commitment by United Way of Rhode Island, above and beyond our existing funding for 2012, will provide much-needed relief for those adversely impacted by the most severe downturn of our lifetime."

During the announcement, Jeanne Gattegno, president & CEO of West Bay Community Action Program, vividly illustrated the challenges facing her organization as requests for help reach new levels.

"Today's storm of need is more severe than anything we've faced," said Gattegno. "I am afraid that without these resources, and with the prospect of additional cuts, the needs of the community would be more than we can bear. Nothing but bad things can happen if we cannot help families and individuals with basic needs."

As lingering issues continue concerning Rhode Island's economy, high rate of unemployment, and the projected structural deficit that further threatens resources available to help those in need, UWRI's Board of Directors unanimously approved the release of the \$1 million in funding from the organization's Community Impact Fund, which will be guided by UWRI's Community Investment Advisory Committee (CIAC).

The primary role of the CIAC is to work in conjunction with UWRI's Board of Directors, staff, community volunteers, and partners to identify community needs and set overall direction to create and implement impact strategies consistent with the organization's priorities. With an increase in need, and the prospect that the situation may become worse before it improves, UWRI did not want to wait any longer before taking action. Members of the CIAC are scheduled to meet immediately to discuss and decide how to invest the funds in the community.

The \$1 million dedicated to community impact will be distributed directly to non-profit agencies working directly with members of the community in providing basic needs assistance. Monies will be dedicated to help struggling Rhode Islanders with such needs as food, shelter, heating assistance, and other living expenses.

Managing *United Way 2-1-1 in Rhode Island (2-1-1)* and the Emergency Food & Shelter Board, the organization knows firsthand the depth of need in communities across the state. During the last year, *2-1-1*, a 24-hour information and referral helpline that connects individuals and families with the resources they need during times of crisis, handled more than 205,000 calls. This represents a 12.5% increase over 2010, and a staggering 68% increase over just two years ago.

In addition to announcing its financial commitment to help those struggling, UWRI is immediately increasing the number of *2-1-1* operators by the equivalent of two full-time employees, making it possible for this critical resource to keep up with an unprecedented call volume.

"Though thousands of Rhode Islanders have lost jobs; many exhausting their unemployment benefits, we remain stubbornly optimistic about the long-term viability of our economy," continued Maione. "But, in the near-term, we face an uphill battle as the state's safety net has been stretched to its limit. We are fortunate to be in a position to make this emergency investment that will help many from falling deeper into crisis. It sends a message to those struggling that they are not in this alone."

Between now and March 1, UWRI will match, dollar for dollar, all contributions to the *Weathering the Storm Fund*. Donations may be made online at [www.uwri.org](http://www.uwri.org) by clicking the *Weathering the Storm* link, or by sending a check made payable to United Way of Rhode Island. Please note that the contribution is for the *Weathering the Storm Fund*.

#### **About United Way of Rhode Island**

United Way of Rhode Island has been working to improve the quality of life in Rhode Island communities for over 80 years. UWRI's mission is to mobilize the caring power of the community to improve the lives of people in need and address the issues Rhode Islanders care most about. United Way's goal is to create long-lasting changes that prevent problems from happening in the first place. We believe that all Rhode Islanders deserve the opportunity to have a better life, as when any one of us succeeds, we all succeed. At United Way, we refer to this as advancing the common good. For more information, visit [www.LIVEUNITEDri.org](http://www.LIVEUNITEDri.org).

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