

Women's Earnings in the Ocean State 1998-2008

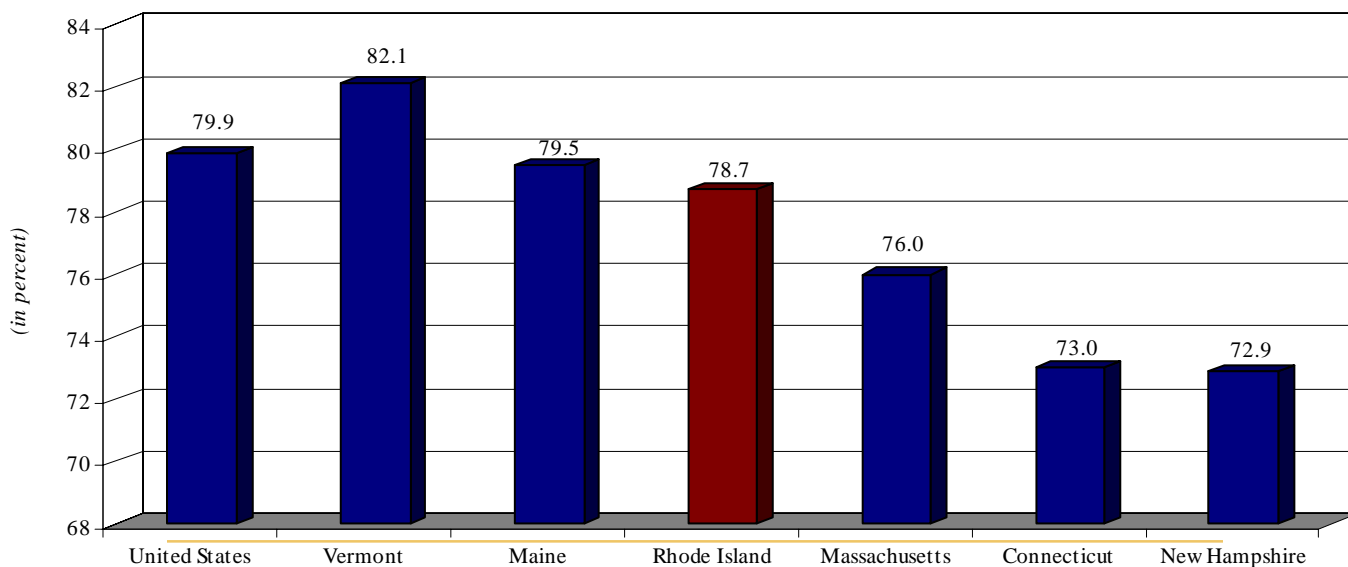
According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Rhode Island women working full-time earned a median weekly wage of \$679 in 2008. This was 78.7 percent of what full-time working males earned that year - the 3rd highest earnings ratio in New England and the 27th highest in the country. Over the past ten years, Rhode Island has seen its female-to-male earnings ratio grow from a low of 71.2 percent in 1998 to a high of 83.9 percent in 2007. However, this past year, Rhode Island posted its largest over-the-year ratio decrease in the past decade, dropping from 83.9 percent in 2007 to 78.7 percent in 2008, a 5.2 percent decline.

Regionally, Vermont (82.1%) reported the smallest earnings differential between women and men, followed by Maine (79.5%), Rhode Island (78.7%), Massachusetts (76.0%), Connecticut (73.0%), and New Hampshire (72.9%). Throughout the country, female-to-male earnings ratios ranged from a high of 92.2 percent in the District of Columbia to just 67.8 percent in Wyoming. Nationwide, women earned 79.9 percent of what men did in 2008. Vermont was the only New England state to report an earnings ratio above 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. For example, men generally have more natural physical strength than women and therefore be better suited to well-paying heavy construction jobs.

Since 1998, the earnings gap between Ocean State women and men working full-time has improved when compared to regional neighbors and the nation as a whole. Whereas Rhode Island women had earned 71.2 percent of what men did in 1998, the ratio had improved to 78.7 percent by 2008. This 7.5 percentage point change was the highest reported in New England and the 3rd highest recorded in the nation during this period (tied with Iowa and Indiana). Only Arkansas (+10.7) and Ohio (+7.9) posted larger percentage gains. Within New England, Vermont's women-to-men earnings gap closed by 5.6 percentage points, followed by Connecticut (+3.5 points) and Maine (+0.4 points). Meanwhile, women workers in both Massachusetts (-3.1 points) and New Hampshire (-3.0 points) saw their earnings fall in comparison to their male counterparts. Nationally, the female-to-male earnings ratio improved by 3.6 percentage points during this period, from 76.3 percent in 1998 to 79.9 percent in 2008.

Between 1998 and 2008, Rhode Island women experienced a much faster growth in median weekly earnings than men did. In 1998, females earned a median weekly wage of \$455 compared to \$638 earned by males. By 2008, women's median weekly earnings had increased by 49.2 percent (+\$224) to \$679, the 8th largest percentage gain over the past ten years nationally. In contrast, the median weekly earnings of Ocean State males rose to \$863, a 35.3 percent (+\$225) increase.

Women's Earnings as a Percent of Men's
United States and the New England states, 2008



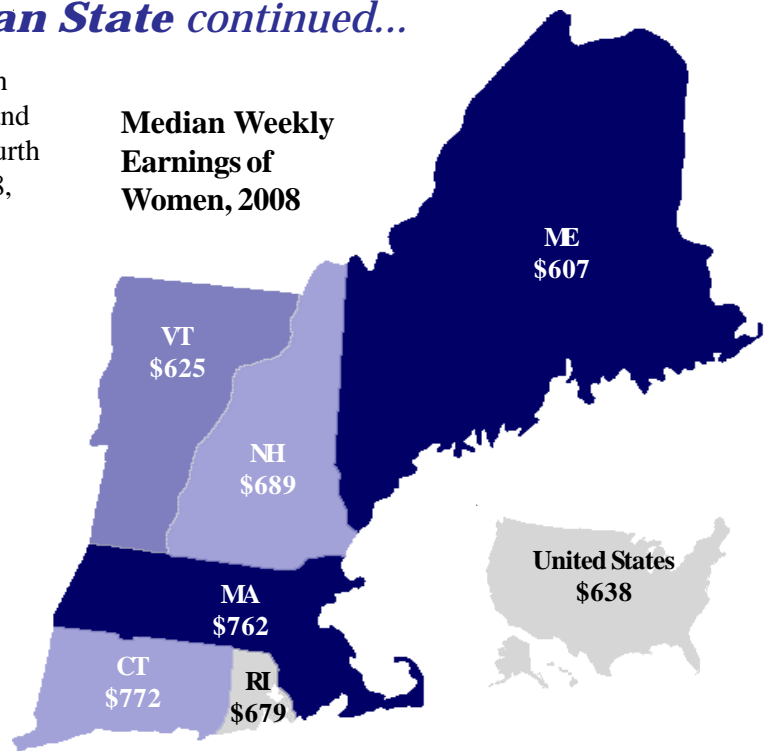
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Women's Earnings in the Ocean State continued...

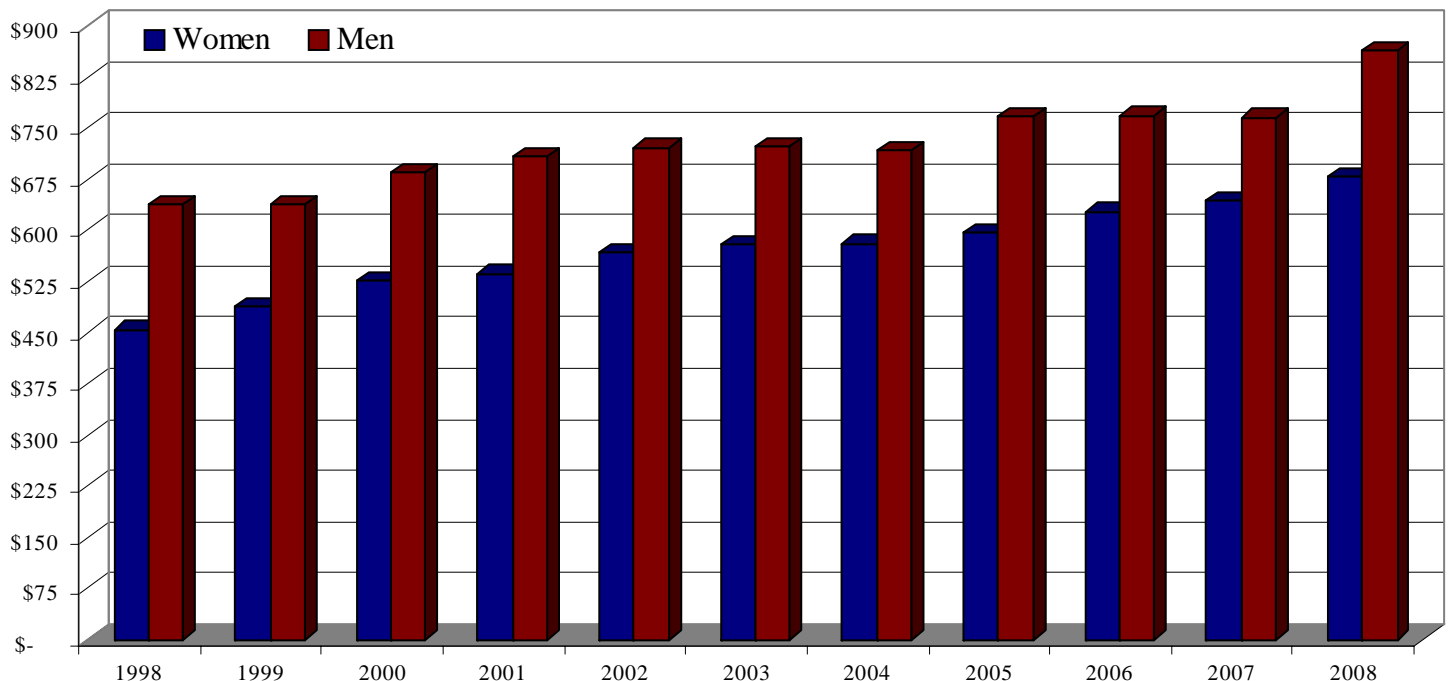
The weekly earnings of Rhode Island women improved in comparison to other New England states between 2007 and 2008. At \$679, women in the Ocean State earned the fourth highest median weekly earnings total in the region in 2008, trailing female wage and salary workers in Connecticut (\$772), Massachusetts (\$762), and New Hampshire (\$689).

The median weekly earnings of Ocean State women increased by 5.6 percent (+\$36) between 2007 and 2008. However, in 2008, Rhode Island men saw their median weekly earnings rise by 12.7 percent (+\$97). Within the region, only Massachusetts (+8.1%) reported an annual growth rate in women's earnings above that of Rhode Island in 2008.

In 2008, women workers in the Ocean State earned the 13th highest median weekly wage (\$679) in the United States, above the national median of \$638. Women's median weekly earnings ranged from a high of \$866 in the District of Columbia to a low of \$510 in Mississippi.



Median Weekly Earnings of Rhode Island Women and Men, 1998-2008



Data is taken from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Highlights of Women's Earnings* series, 1998-2008. Earnings data refers to the median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers, 16 years and over, as measured by the CPS. Data has not been adjusted for inflation.

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