

GOOD-NEWS

Collaboration helps meet Rhode Islanders' essential needs: Commentary

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Special to The Providence Journal

Dec. 25, 2025, 5:00 a.m. ET

I've only lived in Rhode Island for a short time, but it didn't take long for me to understand something essential about this place: When Rhode Islanders see a neighbor in need, they show up. They do it quietly, consistently and with a sense of shared responsibility that feels rare in today's world.

The [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center in Newport](#) embodies that spirit. For more than a century, the MLK Center has been a place where community isn't just talked about, it is lived. Today, their programs reach thousands of Newport County residents through hunger relief, education, wellness programs and opportunities to connect. That breadth of work matters, especially



Melissa Cherney spent a week touring food pantries throughout the state in September after becoming CEO of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank. *Provided By Rhode Island Community Food Bank*

now, when so many families are navigating a “perfect storm” of high housing costs, rising food prices and cuts to critical federal supports like SNAP.

As someone who relied on SNAP myself as a college student, I know how life-changing this support can be and how devastating it is when it falls short. I worked two jobs, couldn't afford the meal plan, and often counted on a shift in the campus catering department to get dinner. SNAP helped me stay afloat during those months when every dollar mattered. It's why I believe so deeply in the importance of organizations like the MLK Center and why I'm proud to lead the Rhode Island Community Food Bank as we work alongside them.

The MLK Center was among my first stops during my first month as CEO of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank. I remain inspired by how responsive the center is to community needs, by the wraparound support they provide, and by the dedication of their supporters and staff.

This season, as demand for food assistance reaches historic highs, organizations like the MLK Center remind us what's possible when we center dignity, compassion and partnership. Their work is a testament to the power of community and to the belief that everyone deserves the chance to thrive.

Rhode Island is stronger because of the MLK Center. I'm grateful to call them partners, and even more grateful to call this community home.

Melissa Cherney is CEO of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank.