



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **BankRI Awards \$78,250 in Grants to Rhode Island Organizations**

**PROVIDENCE, R.I.** – A swim program that provides free lessons to Rhode Island children of color is among the grant recipients of Bank Rhode Island’s (BankRI) most recent charitable giving. In total, the bank has awarded \$78,250 in funding to 30 local organizations. The grants ranged from \$1,000 to \$7,500.

“Rhode Island youth of color drown at a rate five times greater than their white peers,” says Ray Rickman, the Executive Director of Stages of Freedom Swim Empowerment Program. “Swimming is cultural, but in many low-income communities, it is not a common opportunity. So while we aim for fun and empowerment, the lifelong – and lifesaving – skill of knowing how to swim is what we work to instill.”

The swim empowerment program, designed for children ages 5 to 19, was born in part to serve as a model for communities across the country. The organization released a report to removing barriers to swimming proficiency in the African American community in 2013. Since the implementation of the program, Stages of Freedom has taught nearly 3,000 children from across the state how to swim.

“Our goal is to teach 500 children per year, but one of our biggest challenges is recruiting families to get them involved,” adds Rickman. “Whatever we need to do to get a child enrolled, we’ll do. And with additional community support, we can offer lessons to even more children.”

The program works with a network of YMCA branches that span Woonsocket to Cranston and Providence to Newport County, and also includes Seekonk, MA. Families interested in participating can visit [StagesOfFreedom.org/swimempowerment](https://StagesOfFreedom.org/swimempowerment) for the list of partner YMCAs, and call their local branch to confirm an opening in their ‘non-swimmer’ class. Once an opening is reserved, families return to [StagesOfFreedom.org/swimempowerment](https://StagesOfFreedom.org/swimempowerment) to register for payment. For those who lack internet access to register their child, please contact Ray Rickman directly at (401) 421-0606.

“What Stages of Freedom is doing is incredibly important for our community,” said Mark J. Meiklejohn, BankRI’s President and CEO. “As a state with hundreds of miles of coastline and many great freshwater swimming options, we need to make sure children can enjoy the water safely.”

A complete list of funded organizations is as follows:

- Angels’ Care Closet
- AS220
- Beacon Charter School
- Boys & Girls Club of Pawtucket
- Bryant University
- Capital Good Fund

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- City of Pawtucket
- Clothes to Kids Rhode Island
- Community Preparatory School
- Crossroads Rhode Island
- Dorcas International Institute of RI
- Miriam Hospital Foundation
- Norman Bird Sanctuary
- Operation Homefront
- Operation Stand Down Rhode Island
- Pawtucket Foundation
- Providence After School Alliance
- Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra & Music School
- Rhode Island Veterinary Medical Association
- Sargent Rehabilitation Center
- Sojourner House
- Special Olympics Rhode Island
- Stages of Freedom
- Star Kids Scholarship Program
- The Empowerment Factory
- The Learning Community
- The Wolf School
- WaterFire Providence
- West Bay Residential Services
- Women's Club of South County

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**About Bank Rhode Island**

*Bank Rhode Island, a wholly owned subsidiary of Brookline Bancorp, Inc. (NASDAQ:BRKL), is a full-service, FDIC-insured financial institution headquartered in Providence, Rhode Island. The bank operates 20 branches and more than 30 ATMs throughout Providence, Kent, Newport and Washington Counties. For more information, visit [www.bankri.com](http://www.bankri.com).*