



April 8, 2025

Chairman William O'Brien
House Finance Committee
Public Safety Subcommittee
RI State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony re H5076 vis a vis FY26 Office of Public Safety Budget

Dear Chairman O'Brien and members of the committee,

I write regarding the FY26 Department of Public Safety budget and the inadequate funding for victim services included in the state budget.

For 48 years, Sojourner House, a non-profit based in Providence but now providing services across the state, has served thousands of victims and survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and human trafficking. We offer wraparound services such as support groups, emergency shelter, transitional and permanent supportive housing, sexual health advocacy, and emotional support. In 2024, Sojourner House helped nearly 2,000 victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking from 33 different RI cities and towns.

Sojourner House has received VOCA funding through the Department of Public Safety for a number of years. We use these funds to run school- and community-based advocacy, to work with LGBTQ and immigrant communities and provide shelter beds and transitional housing.

This VOCA funding, which is all federal pass-through dollars, has been inconsistent and decreasing steadily. Rhode Island currently spends almost no state funds on victims, unlike the majority of states who invest state funding in victim services.

At the same time, Rhode Island spends approximately \$7,800 per prisoner each year. By allocating just 10% of that amount— about \$750—toward supporting each of the state's 42,000 victims, Rhode Island could commit \$30 million to vital victim services.

You will hear Representative Craven's VICTIM ACT (H5390) later this session which would create a grant pool of \$30 Million to fund programing for the victims and survivors that Sojourner House, and 26 other organizations, work with each day.

386 Smith Street | Providence, RI 02908

Drop-in Center: 401.861.6191 | **Fax:** 401.861.6157 | **Housing Office:** 401.808.6889

Helplines: 401.765.3232 | 401.658.4334 | **Web:** www.sojournerri.org



We believe this is a solid investment in the future of Rhode Islanders. We know the cost of intimate partner violence can be over \$100,000 for a victim in terms of lost wages, mental health and health care. Our programs reduce those costs and help break the cycle of violence since the vast majority of DV victims also have young children.

It's time for Rhode Island to invest in these life-saving programs, just as other states have, to reduce future costs and break the cycle of violence. As you consider this year's budget, we urge you to add VICTIM Act funding into the FY26 Public Safety Budget this year.

Thank you for your time and review of this testimony. Please contact me at Vvolz@Sojournerri.org if you have any questions about our work or this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vanessa Volz', is placed below the word 'Sincerely,'.

Vanessa Volz
President & CEO

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