

Chair Abney  
House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
**Re: Support of the VICTIM Act H 5390**

April 24, 2025

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the Committee,

My name is Angel Schultz. I proudly live in Johnston, in Representative Fellela's district, and I serve as the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program Manager at Sojourner House. I strongly support Rep Craven's VICTIM Act, H5390, that would approve \$30 million in funding for victim services in our state budget.

I write not only as a professional who works every day to support survivors, but as someone who knows, in the deepest way, what's at stake.

I am a child survivor of domestic violence. I lived through terrifying moments no child should ever face. My mother and I survived because she had access to victim services—trauma-informed advocates, legal support, counseling, and safe housing. Those weren't just services. They were the reason we made it out. They were our lifeline.

Now, decades later, I dedicate my work to ensuring that all survivors, including those who are Deaf, hard of hearing, and disabled can access the same support. But I'm here to tell you that we are not there yet. And we won't get there without you.

As a hard of hearing woman and the mother of a Deaf child, I carry the knowledge that Deaf children are at significantly higher risk of abuse than their hearing peers. Yet the systems meant to protect and support them are often inaccessible. Survivors are being turned away because agencies don't have interpreters, because providers aren't culturally competent, because the infrastructure simply isn't there.

At Sojourner House, I am in the very beginning stages of leading an agency wide needs assessment to identify how we can do better, how we can break down those barriers and reach the most marginalized survivors. But my role, like many others doing equity work in this field, is 100% federally funded. Without state support, this work—long overdue and urgently needed—are at risk.

Sojourner House is part of a coalition of 26 organizations serving more than 42,000 victims every year. And still, Rhode Island provides no dedicated funding to support this life-saving work. We are surviving on unstable, shrinking federal grants while other states—Massachusetts, Connecticut—have already stepped up to fund victim services with state dollars.

The VICTIM Act, H5390, is not just a budget item. It is a commitment. A recognition that **ALL** survivors matter, and that their safety cannot depend on uncertain federal scraps. It is an investment in lives, in stability, in a safer Rhode Island for everyone.

The cost of doing nothing is staggering. Survivors already pay it, with their health, their futures, sometimes their lives. We cannot afford to wait any longer.

Please pass the VICTIM Act. Please fund the programs that save lives, because I am living proof that they do.

Thank you for your time, for your service, and for standing with survivors across Rhode Island.

Angel Schultz, MSW, LCSW,  
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program Manager  
Sojourner House, RI