

Chairman Marvin Abney
House Finance Committee
RI State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony in support of H5323

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the committee,

I write in strong support Representative Casey's Joint Resolution to Support Sojourner House, H5323.

My name is Alex Burch and I am the Volunteer and Development Manager for Sojourner House. The goal behind my role is to firstly, provide those looking to support and engage with our community ways in which they can offer their time and energy in ways that do not depend on money. Community members, particularly those who have their own connection to our areas of support, want to help those who are currently in need, but money isn't always the way in which folks are able to do so. Secondly, the way in which volunteers are able to provide a helping hand to the Sojourner House organization goes beyond the positive impact; their abilities speak towards the significant need that nonprofits have in unpaid support, which aids in the ability for the work to get done, without the need to receive financial compensation. Sojourner House, which has been around for nearly 50 years and has aided in wraparound services pertaining to sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking, relies predominately on federal funding, at over 80% of our finances being met by federal funding.

The importance of the work that Sojourner House provides is not just through one avenue; "our goal is to help our clients rebuild their lives, piece by piece, through a variety of services." The services that are provided range from prevention and education programs that aim to teach important information on domestic abuse. As well, Sojourner House works to raise awareness on issues connected to domestic violence: teen dating violence, HIV/AIDS prevention, elder abuse, etc. For these areas, Sojourner House has created specialized services. It is not just having a space for victims and survivors to come to us, but as well, for us to be going to them; creating safe spaces in their own communities and truly meeting them where they are at.

The services do not stop there; housing is a large part of what Sojourner House does; whether it be emergency housing, rapid, transitional, or permanent supportive housing. It is not enough to simply provide the services 9-5, but to ensure that individuals and families are able to seek a safe space where they can heal.

Here lies all of the ways in which Sojourner House is in need of more funding, because the work never stops. We must be able to ensure that any person, any family, any identity can be given the chance to live a safe and healthy life, and in order to continue to provide these services for anyone seeking them, we must be able to sustain the costs necessary to keep this organization alive.

Please support this \$500,000 allocation for Sojourner House.

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

Sincerely,

Alex Burch
1704 Broad Street Cranston, RI