

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 Alyssa Miranda and I am the Legal Program Coordinator for Sojourner House's Expanded Legal Services Initiative (ELIS). The goal of our program at Sojourner House is to represent victims of intimate partner violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and/or stalking in family law matters, including but not limited to custody, child support, divorces, restraining orders, DCYF involvement, and guardianship petitions.

If we were to lose federal funding, that would directly impact our clients by taking away this vital resource for legal services. There is a high need for free legal services in RI. Our program is very new and within the first two weeks of being open for internal referrals, we received over 20 referrals and have taken on about 12 of those cases. We do not see this slowing down. We need more funds to meet the large need in our community. These services give survivors of domestic violence the resources needed to leave their abusers, take legal action against them, and to begin imagining their new life separate from their abusers.

An example of this is one of our clients who had been in an abusive relationship with her spouse for over ten years. She had tried to leave in the past, but her husband's financial, psychological, and physical abuse had always kept her in the relationship. Around the beginning of 2025 our client's spouse had physically assaulted her. She feared for her life and fled with her children to one of our safe shelters, who referred her to our office. She had filed an ex parte restraining order and wanted to file for divorce. We were able to represent her in both legal matters. She was granted a 1-year protective order against the spouse, primary custody placement, and her divorce is ongoing. She would have had no other way to retain an attorney if not for our pro-bono legal services. She is proof that our program is fulfilling a need, but we cannot do this alone.

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

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

Sincerely,

Alyssa Miranda
39 America St.
Providence, RI 02903