

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

May 28, 2025

Re: Testimony in support of H5323

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the committee,

I write to support Representative Casey's Joint Resolution to Support Sojourner House. I am a Sojourner House board member. I joined the board because I know that Sojourner House is doing critical, life-saving work and is doing so very effectively. I am a professor at UMass Law School. I have taught Domestic Violence Law there, as well as at American University Law School in Washington, DC, where I also directed a domestic violence clinic. I have written articles on this topic and presented them at national and international conferences. This background and expertise allow me to assess the quality and capacity of the work of Sojourner House. I believe it to be unparalleled.

For nearly 50 years, Sojourner House, a Providence-based non-profit serving all of Rhode Island, has supported thousands of survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and human trafficking. It offers services like support groups, shelter, permanent housing, sexual health advocacy, and emotional support. In 2024, it assisted nearly 2,000 survivors from 33 RI cities and towns.

Five years ago, recognizing the need for affordable housing, Sojourner House began developing housing as a critical resource for its clients; it now owns or leases over 175 units statewide. These units provide permanent supportive housing to survivors. This is the most effective way to help families transition to safety. Sojourner House is the only organization in Rhode Island creating affordable housing for survivors.

Sojourner House currently receives over 80% of its funding from federal sources, most of which require matching funds. This mandate, as well as the tenuousness of federal funding, offers to Rhode Island the important opportunity to provide matching funds to ensure Sojourner House can continue its vital work.

This state investment will assist in protecting survivors—both adults and children—and, at the same time, help Rhode Island meet its low-income housing goals. Please support this \$500,000 allocation for Sojourner House.

Respectfully submitted,

Justine A. Dunlap

Justine A. Dunlap

55 Burlington St.

Providence, RI 02906