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

Re: Testimony in support of H5323

Dear Chairman and members of the committee:

I write in strong support of H5323 which would provide funds to support the work of Sojourner House as it faces unprecedented federal targeting and funding reductions.

The mission of Sojourner House is to promote healthy relationships by providing culturally sensitive support, advocacy, housing, and education for victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking; and to effect systems change.

Sojourner House is the largest victim services agency in Rhode Island, serving nearly 2000 survivors every year. It is also one of the very few domestic violence agencies in the country that is developing affordable housing for victims. In 2024, Sojourner provided emergency shelter to 79 victims of abuse over 6,213 bed nights along with transitional housing, rapid re-housing and/or permanent supportive housing for 489 survivors over a total of 96,358 bed nights. These were among the nearly 2,000 victims from 33 RI cities and towns that Sojourner helped last year.

Like many non-profit agencies, Sojourner House is facing significant challenges to the federal funding that is critical to its mission. Because many of the individuals we serve identify with the LGBTQ community and/or may be without proper immigration documentation, Sojourner House and its activities may be specifically targeted.

Therefore, whereas in prior years, state funding would have been a supplement to federal funds, now it is essential to protect some of Rhode Island's most vulnerable individuals, especially children.

Five years ago, recognizing the need for affordable housing, Sojourner House began developing housing and now owns or leases over 175 units statewide, providing permanent supportive housing to victims in addition to emergency shelter and rapid re-housing programs. A safe home is the most effective way to help families transition from violence to stability. Sojourner House is the only organization in Rhode Island creating affordable housing for victims. Therefore, funding for Sojourner will not just support victims and survivors of domestic violence, it will also help address the state's overall need for housing funds.

Please support H5323, which would provide a \$500,000 allocation for Sojourner House to continue its vital programs at a time when its programs are under direct attack at the federal level and we urgently need more affordable homes.

Very truly yours

Richard Godfrey