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#### *Member Agencies*

Blackstone Valley  
Advocacy Center

Domestic Violence  
Resource Center of  
South County

Elizabeth Buffum  
Chace Center

Women's Resource Center

#### *Task Force*

Sisters Overcoming  
Abusive Relationships

#### *Affiliate Members*

Center for Southeast Asians

Crossroads Rhode Island

Family Service of Rhode Island

McAuley Ministries –  
McAuley Village

Progreso Latino

YWCA Rhode Island

To: Representative Marvin Abney, Chair of the House Finance Committee  
Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee

From: Lucy Rios, Executive Director  
Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Date: March 24, 2026

Re: **House Bill 7127 – RI Department of Health**

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On behalf of our network of member agencies and SOAR, our taskforce of survivors, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) appreciates this opportunity to weigh in on the Department of Health (RIDOH) section of the Governor's proposed budget. **We write in support of restoring the \$2.1 million allocation to fund all 14 of Rhode Island Health Equity Zones (HEZ).**

The HEZ initiative serves Rhode Island's most vulnerable residents by utilizing a unique, community-driven approach to improving the overall health and resilience of communities throughout the state. The proposed budget lacks support for these collaboratives that have become a critical part of the state's public health infrastructure.

This nationally recognized model has measurably demonstrated its impact over the last ten years, such as:

- Reducing healthcare costs: The average per person public insurance costs are significantly lower in Equity Zone communities than those not in an Equity Zone.
- Reducing rates of chronic disease: Many Equity Zones show lower chronic disease rates than expected given their social vulnerability, with high cholesterol and heart disease declining faster than the state average.
- Strengthening community resilience and recovery: From 2018 to 2022, social vulnerability in Equity Zone communities dropped by 21%. Lower vulnerability reduces harm from disasters, economic downturns, and health crises, enabling faster recovery and response.

The HEZ model also promotes healthy, equitable community conditions that can help prevent domestic violence before it has the chance to start. Since its inception, the Newport HEZ Collaborative has served as the Coordinated Community Response team on the RICADV's DELTA project, a primary prevention initiative funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Women's Resource Center, a RICADV member agency, serves as the backbone agency for the Newport HEZ.

The HEZ infrastructure helps connect residents to resources, local organizations, and one another, and to opportunities to make their voices heard on the issues that directly impact their lives and families. These functions help reduce barriers and increase options for victims and survivors of domestic violence in our state.

We urge the Committee to include HEZ funding in RIDOH's budget. A \$2.1 million allocation guarantees \$150,000 in support of each HEZ. Thank you for your consideration.