



**April 7, 2026**

**House Finance Committee**

**Rhode Island State House Providence, RI 02903**

**Testimony in Support of H 8155 An Act Relating to Criminal Procedure – Criminal Injuries Compensation**

Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Diana Garlington. I am a policy advocate, founder of Safer Communities for Justice, and a mother who has lived through the devastating impact of violence. I am here today in strong support of House Bill No. 8155.

After losing my daughter, Essence T. Christal, to gun violence, my life changed forever. In the aftermath, I was not only grieving, I was navigating trauma, financial strain, and systems that were difficult to access during one of the most painful times of my life. This is the reality for many victims and families across Rhode Island.

Through my advocacy and direct community engagement, I have worked closely with survivors who rely on organizations like Sojourner House and the RI Coalition Against Domestic

Violence. These organizations provide critical, trauma-informed services, safe housing, counseling, advocacy, and support for rebuilding stability. But one of the biggest barriers that survivors face is the ability to relocate safely when their lives are at risk.

This legislation is important because it allows a greater portion of existing compensation to be used for relocation expenses. While it does not increase the total award, it gives survivors flexibility to prioritize immediate safety. For many families, relocation is not optional, it is necessary for survival. Without the ability to move, many are forced to remain in dangerous environments, increasing the risk of continued harm.

I have seen firsthand how access to resources can determine whether a survivor is able to move forward or remain stuck in crisis. This bill recognizes that safety must come first and that survivors should have the ability to use available funds in the ways that best meet their needs. Supporting this legislation is a step toward a more compassionate and responsive system, one that understands the real-life challenges survivors face, and removes barriers instead of creating them. My daughter was also a victim of domestic violence. She was loved, she was valued, and her life mattered. I continue this work so that other families have access to the support and resources they need to survive and heal.

I respectfully urge you to support House Bill No. 8155.  
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Diana Garlington  
Policy Program Officer  
United Way of Rhode Island