

Chair Marvin L. Abney
House Finance
Rhode Island State House

April 8, 2026



RE: Testimony in support of BILL H8155—Criminal Injuries Compensation

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of House Bill 8155**. By strengthening victim compensation resources for relocation costs, this bill helps ensure survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking are supported in seeking protection from harm.

For 50 years, Sojourner House, a non-profit based in Providence but now providing services across the state, has served thousands of victims and survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and human trafficking. We offer wraparound services such as support groups, emergency shelter, transitional and permanent supportive housing, sexual health advocacy, and emotional support. We believe that everyone deserves a safe, healthy home, and proudly house all genders.

Survivors may have access to compensation through Rhode Island’s Criminal Injuries Compensation program, however the current restrictions limit how much of that money can be used for relocation. Due to the challenging housing landscape in our state where affordable housing stocks remain critically low, many people fleeing violent situations cannot afford the first month’s rent, security deposits, or temporary housing, leaving them trapped in life-threatening circumstances.ⁱ

When people attempt to leave or seek help with abusive relationships, it is typically at times when the violence has escalated significantly making it a particularly crucial moment for safety.ⁱⁱ Being brave enough to attempt to leave or ask for help for the first time without the appropriate resources available in our communities leaves people at substantial risk of experiencing increased violence and even losing their lives at the hands of their abusers.ⁱⁱⁱ Research shows that the rates at which people return to their abusive households increases as the lack of supportive and affordable housing available decreases.^{iv} Thus, without adequate resources to secure stable housing, survivors risk returning to unsafe situations.

Intervention and support during this transition is essential to lasting safety and survival.

H8155 addresses this barrier by allowing survivors to use a larger portion of their compensation for relocation and safety-related expenses. This is a practical, low-cost, high-impact step that can directly save lives. On behalf of Sojourner House, we respectfully urge you to **SUPPORT** House Bill 8155 to give survivors more resources needed to leave abusive or dangerous situations safely. This bill is a commonsense and lifesaving measure.

ⁱ National Low-Income Housing Association (NLHI) (n.d.). The gap: A shortage of affordable homes. <https://nlihc.org/gap>

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- ⁱⁱ Mayock, P. & Neary, F. (2025). "Where am I going to go tonight? Where am I literally going to go?": Exploring the dynamics of domestic violence and family homelessness. *Journal of Family Violence*, 40, 987-1002. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00667-8>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Campbell, J. C., Webster, D., Koziol-McLain, J., Block, C., Campbell, D., Curry, M. A., Gary, F., Glass, N., McFarlane, J., Sachs, C., Sharps, P., Ulrich, Y., Wilt, S. A., Manganello, J., Schollenberger, J., Frye, V., & Loughton, K. (2003). Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: Results from a multisite case control study. In *Domestic Violence* (pp. 135-143).
- ^{iv} Melbin, Sullivan, & Cain, 2003 IN Ponic, P., Varcoe, C., Davies, L., Ford-Gilboe, M., Wuest, J., & Hammerton, J. (2011). Leaving ≠ moving: Housing patterns of women who have left an abusive partner. *Violence Against Women*, 17(12), 1576-1600. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801211436163>