Chair Marvin L. Abney

House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House

April 29, 2026

Sojourner House
Committed to Ending:
Domestic Violence • Sexual Assault • Human Trafficking

Re: Support for H7803 – State Funded Rental Subsidy Program

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support of House Bill 7803**. Establishing a state-funded rental subsidy program in Rhode Island is critical to closing the affordable housing gap, strengthening our safety net, and preventing homelessness before it begins. By helping people remain stably housed, this program allows the state to intervene earlier before individuals and families fall into crisis, where the human and financial costs are far greater.

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.

Homelessness in Rhode Island is fundamentally driven by a severe shortage of housing affordable to the lowest-income residents. While the state has made important investments in housing production, extremely low-income households, especially individuals with disabilities still cannot afford available units without additional subsidy. Nearly 1 in every 3 Rhode Islanders is cost-burdened, spending more than one-third of their income on rent and there are only about 30 available units for every 100 extremely low-income renters.[viii,vii,i] As a result, 70% of these households struggle to secure stable, appropriate housing. This shortage is reflected in the state's 2024 point-in-time count, which showed a 36% increase in unsheltered, chronically homeless individuals.[ii]

The housing crisis in our state is deeply relevant to the safety of the most vulnerable Rhode Islanders. **Access to affordable, stable housing is the number one barrier to finding safety outside of a violent relationship**.[iii,iv,v] Nearly 1 in 2 Rhode Island women and 2 in 5 Rhode Island men experience domestic violence in their lifetimes, and research shows that rates of domestic violence homicides are rising.[vi,vii,viii,ix] When survivors attempt to leave, it is often during periods of escalating danger. Without available housing, they face an impossible choice of remaining in an abusive situation or risking homelessness.

At Sojourner House, we see this reality every day. In fiscal year 2025 alone, we were unable to meet 95%, or 1,238, of requests for help from Rhode Islanders seeking housing or shelter to flee abuse due to a lack of resources. Research shows that when affordable housing is unavailable, survivors are significantly more likely to return to their abusers, increasing their risk of further violence or death.[x] The challenge is compounded by the fact that survivors are disproportionately low-income and nearly all experience economic abuse, which limits their ability to secure housing.[xixii] Many also qualify for permanent supportive housing due to serious mental health impacts such as PTSD and depression.[xiii] However, current eligibility requirements, such as a 12-month homelessness threshold exclude many survivors who are at immediate risk but not yet technically homeless.

A state-funded rental subsidy would address this gap by providing flexible, immediate support to individuals at risk of homelessness, including survivors of domestic violence. Expanding access to deeply affordable housing is essential not only to reduce homelessness, but to prevent violence and save lives.

The more stable, permanent housing options we can provide for families to rebuild their lives, the more successful we can become in breaking the cycle of abuse that often forces victims to return to an abusive situation. On behalf of Sojourner House, we respectfully urge you to **SUPPORT** House Bill 7803 to help ensure the most vulnerable Rhode Islanders can access a safe place to sleep and call home.

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[viii] Centers for Disease Control (December, 2023). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 State Report. https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/NISVS-2016-2017-State-Report-508.pdf
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