

Re: Testimony in support of H7324

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the committee,

I write in strong support of Representative Casey's Joint Resolution to Support Sojourner House.

For 50 years, Sojourner House, a Providence-based non-profit now serving all of Rhode Island, has supported over 60,000 victims and survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and human trafficking. They offer services like support groups, shelter, housing, sexual health advocacy, and emotional support.

My name is Saribel Cruz, and I serve as the Director of Housing Stabilization at Sojourner House. In my role, I oversee programs that help survivors of domestic violence and their families access safe, stable housing. Our team works closely with clients to navigate complex housing systems, secure rental assistance, and ensure they have the resources they need to rebuild their lives. I live here in Providence, and I'm deeply committed to this community and the people we serve.

Victim services are not just helpful, they are essential. Survivors often leave everything behind to escape abuse: their homes, belongings, financial stability, and sometimes their support networks. Without services like those provided by Sojourner House, many would have nowhere to go. I remember working with a mother of three who had fled a violent partner. Because of our support, she was able to move into her own unit through our Rapid Rehousing Program, access counseling, and eventually secure a full-time job. Today, she and her children are thriving in their own apartment. That's the impact our work can have.

Unfortunately, our resources are stretched thin. The need is growing, but the funding has not kept pace. Just last month, I had to turn away a survivor in crisis because we had no available shelter beds. She had nowhere safe to go that night. I can't express how heartbreaking that moment was for her, and for us.

Federal funding cuts would have devastating consequences. We are currently assisting a client who depends on our rental assistance to keep her apartment. She has made tremendous progress, but without continued support, she could end up homeless again. Another client, a single father of one, relies on our grocery assistance each month while he works toward permanent employment. These are not just numbers, these are real people, working hard to survive and rebuild.

At Sojourner House, we do everything we can to stretch every dollar, but the reality is clear: we need greater funding to continue meeting the rising demand. Survivors deserve more than a chance to deserve stability, dignity, and a future free from violence.

Sojourner House is a profound asset to our Rhode Island community especially to those from some of the most vulnerable backgrounds. In 2025, nearly two thirds (63%) of their clients were homeless at the time of intake and 93% were considered low or extremely low-income. Overall, last year, they assisted over 5,000 victims across the state in nearly every city.

Seven years ago, recognizing the need for affordable housing, Sojourner House began developing housing and now owns or leases over 200 units statewide, providing permanent supportive housing to victims. This is the most effective way to help families transition to safety and Sojourner House does it effectively by stretching funds to ensure those most people and families are supported. For example, with the proposed \$500,000 allocation, they

could house 70 more adults and 127 more children with a savings of nearly 93% of what it would cost another state entity to do the same.

Sojourner House is the **only organization in Rhode Island creating affordable housing for victims**. They receive over 80% of their funding from federal sources, most of which require matching funds. It's time for Rhode Island to provide matching funds to ensure Sojourner House can continue its vital work.

This is a smart return on investment and is helping Rhode Island meet its low-income housing goals. Please support this \$500,000 allocation for Sojourner House.

Thank you,

Saribel Cruz
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