

**Chair Marvin L. Abney
May 13, 2026
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House**

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 nonprofit 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 such as support groups, emergency shelter, housing assistance, sexual health advocacy, and ongoing emotional support for individuals and families in crisis.

My name is Vicky DePena, and I serve as a Mosaic Intervention Coordinator at Sojourner House, where I have worked for nearly four years. In my role, I work directly with mothers and families by pairing mothers with volunteer clients, supporting maternal health clients, and assisting housing clients when needed. I provide direct, hands-on support to individuals navigating trauma, housing instability, and the challenges of rebuilding their lives. Through this work, I have seen firsthand how access to consistent, compassionate services can transform outcomes for families, particularly mothers and children.

I have had the privilege of witnessing the life-changing impact of Sojourner House's services. I have seen clients move from crisis to stability through safe housing, advocacy, and wraparound support. The work of this organization is not only effective and professional, but deeply rooted in dignity, care, and long-term healing.

Sojourner House is a profound asset to our Rhode Island community, especially for 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 nearly every city in the state.

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 survivors. This is one of the most effective ways to help families transition to safety, and Sojourner House delivers this support efficiently and responsibly, maximizing every dollar to ensure the greatest possible impact for individuals and families in need.

For example, with the proposed \$500,000 allocation, Sojourner House could house approximately 70 additional adults and 127 children, representing a savings of nearly 93% compared to the cost of providing similar support through other state systems.

Sojourner House is currently the only organization in Rhode Island developing affordable housing specifically for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. They receive over 80% of their funding from federal sources, much of which requires matching funds. It is critical that the State of Rhode Island provide this match to ensure the continuation and expansion of these essential services.

This is a smart investment with a strong return for the state and directly supports Rhode Island's goals of expanding affordable housing and reducing homelessness. I respectfully urge the committee to support the \$500,000 allocation for Sojourner House.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Sincerely,
Vicky DePena
Mosaic Intervention Coordinator
Sojourner House**