



RE: Testimony in support of The Domestic Violence Calendar, H8547

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Sojourner House of Rhode Island, we write in strong support of **H8547**, which aligns with our commitment of supporting survivors of domestic and sexual violence (DV/SV) that is attuned to the specific barriers that often plague survivors of DV/SV. As a prominent non-profit organization in Rhode Island serving over 5,000 clients in 2025 in almost all cities and towns across our state, we are well positioned to speak to the needs of survivors of domestic and sexual violence and the timeliness of **H8547** which would establish a dedicated Superior Court calendar for felony domestic violence cases.

Every day, at Sojourner House, we work with survivors across Rhode Island who are navigating not only trauma and safety concerns, but also a complicated court system. Survivors frequently report that inconsistent court practices, fragmented scheduling, and delays in felony case resolution can increase fear, uncertainty, and risk. H8547 represents an important step toward creating a more coordinated and informed judicial response to domestic violence.

Domestic violence cases are uniquely complex. They often involve patterns of coercive control, escalating violence, multiple related court orders, witness intimidation, and ongoing safety concerns for victims and children. A specialized calendar would help ensure greater consistency in judicial oversight, bail determinations, no-contact order enforcement, and case management. It would also promote better coordination among prosecutors, victim advocates, probation officers, and the court.

Specialized domestic violence court models used in other jurisdictions have demonstrated benefits that can include improved victim safety and satisfaction, greater consistency in judicial decision-making, reduced case delays, enhanced special pre-trial bail conditions, and more informed responses to high-risk cases.^{i,ii,iii,iv} Importantly, H8547 recognizes that domestic violence is not simply an isolated criminal incident, but a pattern of behavior that often requires informed, trauma-responsive handling by all system actors.

Sojourner House also supports this bill because survivors are more likely to participate in the legal process when they believe the system understands the dynamics of abuse and will respond consistently. Predictability and coordination within the court process can reduce re-victimization and re-traumatization to increase survivors' overall confidence in the justice system.

We respectfully encourage the Committee to support H8547 and continue Rhode Island's efforts to strengthen protections for survivors of domestic violence and hold offenders accountable. Thank you for your consideration.

ⁱ Moore, S. (2009). Two decades of specialized domestic violence courts. *Center for Court Innovation*.
https://www.innovatingjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/DV_Court_Lit_Review.pdf

ⁱⁱ Cissner, A. B., Labriola, M., & Rempel, M. (2013). Testing the effects of New York's domestic violence courts: A statewide impact evaluation. *National Institute of Justice*. <https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/testing-effects-new-yorks-domestic-violence-courts-statewide-impact-evaluation>

ⁱⁱⁱ Labriola, M., Bradley, S., O'Sullivan, C. S., Rempel, M., & Moore, S. (2010). A national portrait of domestic violence courts. *Center for Court Innovation*. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/229659.pdf>

^{iv} Indiana Court Times (25 April, 2024). Specialized domestic violence courts. <https://times.courts.in.gov/2014/04/25/specialized-domestic-violence-courts/>