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Member Agencies

Blackstone Valley
Advocacy Center
Domestic Violence
Resource Center of
South County
Elizabeth Buffum
Chace Center

Women's Resource Center

Task Force

Sisters Overcoming
Abusive Relationships

Affiliate Members

Center for Southeast Asians
Crossroads Rhode Island
Family Service of Rhode Island
McAuley Ministries –
McAuley Village
Progreso Latino
YWCA Rhode Island

To: Representative Marvin L. Abney, Chair of the House Finance Committee
Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee

From: Lucy Rios, Executive Director
RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Date: May 19, 2026

Re: **Support for H-8547, Domestic Violence calendar within the Superior Court**

On behalf of our network of member agencies and SOAR (Sisters Overcoming Abusive Relationships), our taskforce of survivors, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) appreciates this opportunity to voice **our support for House Bill 8547, which would implement a Domestic Violence calendar within the Superior Court.**

This legislation would establish a separate specialized domestic violence calendar within the Rhode Island Superior Court to handle felony domestic violence cases, including violations of protective orders and firearms-related crimes, both of which represent strong indicators of high lethality risk for victims of domestic abuse. Any other criminal proceedings arising from the same act, or otherwise related to a domestic violence matter, may be eligible for this special docket as well. The Presiding Justice of the Superior Court would assign personnel to hear cases on the domestic violence calendar and provide for the consistent assignment of such cases in order to promote continuity of judicial oversight. Cases assigned to the domestic violence calendar shall be given priority in scheduling and disposition, consistent with the rights of the parties.

We support this legislation and offer our enthusiastic assistance to the Superior Court as statewide and nationally recognized subject matter experts on intimate partner violence prevention in Rhode Island. Our member agencies employ specialized Court Advocates that assist victims of domestic abuse in courthouses across the state, ensuring they understand the legal process and their rights as victims and that they have access to civil protective orders and other lifesaving services.

As the state's Domestic Violence Coalition, we are members of the *National Network to End Domestic Violence* (NNEDV) in Washington, D.C., and we work closely with various national-level subject matter experts, including the [Center for Justice Innovation](#) (formerly the Center for Court Innovation), the national court system best practices and technical assistance organization based in New York City. The Center for Justice Innovation has renowned expertise in advising jurisdictions in implementing successful specialized domestic violence criminal court dockets and DV Courts across the country and could provide technical assistance regarding this exciting project as well.

In 2025 alone, over 2,700 Rhode Island victims received support from a Court Advocate in obtaining a domestic violence restraining order in District or Family Court. This statistic shows the importance of implementation of court initiatives and specialized calendars and programs that prioritize the safety of domestic abuse survivors and allow for dedicated and fully informed judicial decisionmakers in these high-risk cases.

Our member agencies' Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy Program provides direct assistance to victims of domestic and sexual violence navigating criminal misdemeanor

cases, as well as support with applying for civil restraining orders. These life-saving services help survivors when an abusive party has been arrested, as well as when a survivor seeks a protective order for themselves or their children, even in the absence of a criminal arrest. Advocates are available at every Rhode Island courthouse to provide support and empower survivors of intimate partner violence. They explain victims' rights and what to expect in the often complex court process. Advocates can also help communicate survivors' wishes to prosecutors or other court personnel and help guide the survivor through the legal system.

In addition, Court Advocates connect survivors to other vital resources through their domestic violence agency and local partners, including free counseling for adults and children who witness violence, legal services, shelter and safe housing options, support groups, economic supports, crime victim compensation information, and more. All services are free and confidential for survivors.

The RICADV is Rhode Island's only federally recognized domestic violence coalition made up of agencies serving victims throughout the state and providing direct services to approximately 10,000 survivors annually. Our full member agencies were among the first to provide services for victims of domestic violence in Rhode Island and have been the bedrock of our community's response to domestic violence for almost half a century.

We urge the committee to support and pass this legislation. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.