



641 Bald Hill Road  
Warwick, RI 02886  
401-467-9940  
[www.ricadv.org](http://www.ricadv.org)  
[ricadv@ricadv.org](mailto:ricadv@ricadv.org)  
24-hour Helpline:  
800-494-8100

### *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 Robert E. Craven, Sr., Chair of the House Judiciary Committee  
Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee

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

Date: February 25, 2025

Re: **Support for House Bill 5358**

---

On behalf of our network of member agencies and SOAR, our taskforce of survivors, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) appreciates this opportunity to express our **support for House Bill 5358**. This bill would, under certain circumstances, provide immunity to people involved in commercial sexual activity when reporting crimes to law enforcement. Violence against sex workers too often goes unchecked. Ensuring safe reporting empowers people involved in commercial sexual activity, many of whom are impacted by gender-based violence, to seek justice without fear of criminalization.

The United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally recognizes that sex workers are one of the populations most affected by gender-based violence.<sup>1</sup> Research indicates that up to 75% of sex workers experience sexual violence on the job.<sup>2</sup> According to data collected by Brown University and COYOTE RI, an organization made up of current and former sex workers and trafficking victims:

- 47% of sex workers in RI have been victims or witnesses of serious crimes they didn't report to law enforcement.<sup>3</sup>
- 27% of sex workers in RI who have reported crimes have been threatened with arrest or arrested.<sup>3</sup>
- 77% of sex workers in RI said that they would report violent crimes to police if there were an immunity law in place to protect them.<sup>3</sup>

**Sex workers are extremely vulnerable to experiencing crime yet are too often deterred from reporting to law enforcement for fear of facing criminal charges related to commercial sex work.** This deterrent effect prevents sex workers who have survived violence from accessing safety and justice. Over the last 10 years in RI, prostitution arrests have also disproportionately impacted Black and Asian communities, worsening these impacts for sex workers of color.<sup>4</sup>

For the reasons stated above, we believe that this bill will have positive effects on improving survivor safety, racial equity, and justice in our state, and further efforts should be considered to reduce violence against people involved in commercial sexual activity. All survivors of violence in our state deserve to utilize safety systems and resources free from fear and stigma. **We urge the committee to support this proposed legislation.**

---

<sup>1</sup> United States Agency for International Development. (2022). 2022 UPDATE. *UNITED STATES STRATEGY TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE GLOBALLY*.: Department of State. [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/GBV-Global-Strategy-Report\\_v6-Accessible-1292022.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/GBV-Global-Strategy-Report_v6-Accessible-1292022.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Deering, K., Amin, A., Shoveller, J., Nesbitt, A., Garcia-Moreno, C., Duff, P., Argento, E., Shannon, K. (2014, May). A systematic review of the correlates of violence against sex workers. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104(5), 42-54. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.301909>

<sup>3</sup> Rhode Island Chapter of Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE RI). (2015). Survey Quantitative Data. In *Trafficking and the Sex Industry in Rhode Island* (pp. 1-23). Brown University. <https://doi.org/10.26300/j45e-yb73>

<sup>4</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting System. (2022). Rhode Island. In *Crime Data Explorer*. Federal Bureau of Investigation. <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/crime-trend>