



RE: Testimony in support of House Bill 7211, The Rhode Island Community Protection Act

Dear Chair McEntee and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support of House Bill 7211.**

For 50 years, Sojourner House, a non-profit based in Providence but now providing services across the state, has served thousands of victims and survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and human trafficking. We offer wraparound services such as support groups, emergency shelter, transitional and permanent supportive housing, sexual health advocacy, and emotional support. We believe that everyone deserves a safe, healthy home, and proudly house all genders.

While this bill is not specifically a domestic violence measure, it has important implications for survivors of abuse and for the overall safety of our Rhode Island communities. H7211 would require law enforcement officers to display visible identification and would prohibit the use of masks or disguises during public-facing interactions, with limited exceptions for safety and undercover work. It also establishes accountability measures, including civil liability, when these standards are violated.

Many survivors — particularly those from marginalized communities — already hesitate before contacting law enforcementⁱ. They may fear how officers will behave upon arrival or whether the situation will escalate. Policies that emphasize visibility and accountability send an important message that interactions with police must be transparent and regulated. When survivors believe that officers are clearly identifiable and subject to enforceable standards, they may feel more confident reaching out for help before violence worsens. That confidence is critical where delayed reporting can mean prolonged abuse or increased danger given that most people seek help during times of escalating abuse^{ii,iii}. When officers' faces are obscured or identification is unclear, it can increase fear and confusion during already traumatic situations, escalate tension in volatile domestic settings, and undermine a survivor's sense of safety and control. Requiring visible identification and limiting the use of masks helps ensure that survivors can clearly understand who is responding and feel more secure in accepting assistance.

H7211 includes mechanisms for civil liability when officers violate visibility requirements. Accountability provisions matter because they reinforce that public-facing law enforcement must operate within clear, enforceable boundaries. For domestic violence survivors, this translates into greater reassurance that their rights will be respected, interactions with police will be traceable and reviewable, and the system values transparency in moments of crisis. When survivors feel safer engaging the justice system, public safety improves for everyone.

Domestic violence advocacy consistently emphasizes trauma-informed and survivor-centered responses. Transparent, clearly identifiable policing aligns with those principles. It reduces intimidation, clarifies authority, and promotes communication during high-stress interventions. For survivors deciding whether to seek protection, these standards can make a meaningful difference. For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to support H7211. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ⁱ Bullock, H. E., Reppond, H. A., Truong, S. V., & Singh, M. R. (2020). An intersectional analysis of the feminization of homelessness and mothers' housing precarity. *Journal of Social Issues*, 76, 835-858. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12406>

ⁱⁱ Mayock, P. & Neary, F. (2025). "Where am I going to go tonight? Where am I literally going to go?": Exploring the dynamics of domestic violence and family homelessness. *Journal of Family Violence*, 40, 987-1002. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00667-8>

ⁱⁱⁱ Saxton, M. D., Jaffe, P. G., & Olszowy, L. (2020). The police role in domestic homicide prevention: Lessons from a domestic violence death review committee. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(3-4), 80-104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520933030>