

Chair Carol M. McEntee  
House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island State House

March 4, 2026



**RE: Testimony in support of House Bill 7360, Protect our Courts Act**

Dear Chair McEntee and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support of H7360**, which focuses on protecting access to Rhode Island's courthouses and safeguarding individuals from certain civil enforcement actions while attending court proceedings.

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.

For many domestic violence survivors, the courthouse can be a lifeline. Survivors must appear in court to seek protective orders, participate in custody and visitation hearings, testify in criminal proceedings, and request modifications to ensure their safety. If survivors fear that attending court could expose them to unexpected civil arrest or enforcement actions unrelated to their case, they may delay or avoid appearing altogether. This fear is rooted in lived experiences of survivors that have experienced or witnessed immigration consequences tied to reporting crimes.<sup>i</sup>

Domestic violence survivors already face enormous obstacles when navigating the legal system due to financial dependence, coercion, trauma, childcare challenges, and fear of retaliation.<sup>ii,iii</sup> Adding fear of enforcement while entering or leaving a courthouse compounds those barriers creating a chilling effect where **survivors may be hesitant, or even afraid, to report abuse, seek protective orders, or access other critical legal remedies if they fear that any interaction with law enforcement could lead to detention, deportation, or separation from their family.**<sup>iv</sup>

Policies that ensure individuals can attend court proceedings without unrelated civil enforcement actions strengthen the integrity of the justice system. Courts cannot function effectively if victims, witnesses, or litigants are afraid to appear. House Bill 7360 reinforces a foundational principle ensuring access to courts are meaningful and safe for all. **When survivors know they can attend hearings without facing unexpected enforcement actions, they are more likely to seek protective relief early, participate fully in proceedings, and comply with court processes.**<sup>v</sup> **For survivors of domestic violence, courthouse access is directly tied to physical safety, child welfare, and long-term stability.**<sup>vi</sup> Ensuring unobstructed access to justice supports the rule of law and the protection of vulnerable individuals. For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to support H7360.

---

<sup>i</sup> Alliance for Immigrant Survivors (2025). Fear and silence: 2025 insights from advocates for immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. <https://www.immigrantsurvivors.org/fear-and-silence-report>

---

<sup>ii</sup> Fanning, P. (n.d.). Recognizing financial abuse: A growing weapon in intimate partner violence. University of Maryland School of Social Work. <https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/fall-2024-connections/alumni-and-faculty-making-an-impact-in-ipv/recognizing-financial-abuse-a-growing-weapon-in-intimate-partner-violence-/#:~:text=Two%20frequently%20cited%20studies%20of,78%20percent%20reported%20employment%20sabotage>

<sup>iii</sup> National Network to End Domestic Violence (n.d.). About financial abuse. <https://nnedv.org/content/about-financial-abuse/#:~:text=Research%20indicates%20that%20financial%20abuse,returning%20to%20an%20abusive%20partner>

<sup>iv</sup> Dhingra, R., Kilborn, M., & Woldemikael, O. (2022). Immigration policies and access to the justice system: The effect of enforcement escalations on undocumented immigrants and their communities. *Political Behavior*, 44, 1359-1387. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09663-w>

<sup>v</sup> Shah, N. D., Nguyen, G., Wagman, J. A., Glik, D. C. (2022). Factors influencing the use of domestic violence restraining orders in Los Angeles. *Violence Against Women*, 29(9), 1604-1622. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012221120442>

<sup>vi</sup> Wider Opportunities for Women (October, 2012). Justice system police series. <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Protection-Orders-and-Survivors>