



**RE: Testimony in support of H7200, Cause of Action**

Dear Chair McEntee and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of **House Bill 7200**, which would allow survivors of child sexual abuse to pursue accountability against all responsible parties including institutions that enabled, facilitated, or failed to prevent abuse and not just individual perpetrators. H7200 extends the window for bringing civil suits to 35 years after the abuse or 7 years after discovery, and it also provides a revival window until June 30, 2028 for individuals whose previous civil claims were barred due to time limitations.

For 50 years, **Sojourner House**, a Providence-based non-profit now serving communities statewide, has supported thousands of victims and survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and human trafficking. We offer wraparound services including support groups, emergency shelter, transitional and permanent supportive housing, sexual health advocacy, and emotional support. We believe everyone deserves a safe, healthy home and proudly serve individuals of all genders.

Recent investigations into the Diocese of Providence by the Attorney General's Office of Rhode Island revealed decades of sexual abuse by clergy, involving at least 75 priests and over 300 child victims, as well as systemic concealment by church authorities.<sup>i</sup> Many survivors did not disclose abuse until years or even decades later, reflecting the profound trauma created by both abusers and the institutions that enabled them. Child sexual abuse rarely results in immediate disclosure, and many survivors do not come forward until years or even decades after the harm occurred, particularly when abused by family members, trusted adults, or authority figures.<sup>ii</sup> Psychological trauma, fear, shame, and power dynamics inherent in abuse often delay reporting and access to justice.<sup>iii</sup>

Civil statutes of limitations should not prevent survivors from seeking redress simply because they were unable to speak out within an arbitrary timeframe. H7200 removes these barriers by ensuring that all causes of action based on sexual abuse or exploitation of a child are not subject to any statute of limitations, including claims that would otherwise be time-barred. Importantly, the bill provides a limited revival window, allowing survivors whose previous claims were barred by time constraints to file civil lawsuits against both individual perpetrators and negligent institutions. This ensures that survivors have the opportunity for accountability, financial relief, and closure while reinforcing Rhode Island's commitment to justice, transparency, and survivor-centered support.

To help offset potential negative side effects for institutions providing care for children, H7200 should be paired with measures that hold insurance companies accountable to provide reasonable coverage for childcare and other child-serving institutions, ensuring that facilities can remain open while still supporting survivors' rights to seek justice.

House Bill 7200 aligns with trauma-informed principles by recognizing the prevalence of delayed reporting in child sexual abuse cases and allowing survivors greater agency in seeking closure. For these reasons, **Sojourner House strongly supports H7200** and urges the committee to advance this vital legislation.

---

<sup>i</sup> Official State of Rhode Island Website. Report on child sexual abuse in the Diocese of Providence. <https://riag.ri.gov/diocese-report>

<sup>ii</sup> McElvaney, R. (2013). Disclosures of child sexual abuse: Delays, non-disclosure and partial disclosure. What research tells us and implications for practice. *Child Abuse Review*, 24(3), 159-169. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2280>

<sup>iii</sup> McElvaney, R., Lateef, R., Collin-Vezina, D., Alaggia, R., & Simpson, M. (2021). Bringing shame out of the shadows: Identifying shame in child sexual abuse disclosure process and implications for psychotherapy. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 30(37). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211037435>