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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 Carol Hagan McEntee, Chair of the House Judiciary Committee
Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee

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

Date: March 12, 2026

Re: Support for House Bill 7206

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 7206**. This bill would grant an affirmative defense for certain privileged communications, including communications made by an individual, without malice, regarding an incident of sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination.

The links between domestic and sexual violence are well documented. The majority of female victims of rape report that their perpetrator was their intimate partner.¹ Sexual violence, alongside other forms of abusive behavior like physical and emotional abuse, is often used as a means of power and control.

Disclosing experiences of domestic and sexual violence is a choice not all survivors make. When survivors do choose to report, it can often take months or years to feel ready to make that decision. **This bill helps correct the intimidating realities that survivors face when deciding whether to report their experiences of sexual violence by reducing the threat of retaliatory defamation lawsuits.**

During calendar year 2025, Rhode Island's statewide network of domestic violence shelters and advocacy programs served nearly 9,700 survivors of abuse and over 12,700 helpline calls were answered. The prevalence of domestic and sexual violence in Rhode Island contributes to the urgency of enhancing legal protections for survivors.

As an organization invested in eliminating domestic violence and building communities that are responsive to the needs of victims, this bill supports our mission by increasing protections for survivors in our state to report their experiences and seek justice without fear of costly legal entanglements with their perpetrator that can be retraumatizing.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation and your support to prevent domestic and sexual violence and enhance safety for survivors in Rhode Island. **We urge your support of H. 7206.**

¹Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M.R. (2011). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.