



RE: Testimony in support of H7547, Criminal Injuries Compensation

Dear Chair McEntee and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong in support of H7547**, which would include stalking as a covered offense under Rhode Island's Victim Compensation Program.

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.

Stalking is a serious and pervasive form of abuse that often overlaps with domestic violence and sexual assault. **Research shows that stalking by an intimate partner is particularly dangerous with the average length of stalking by a former partner at 2.2 years, significantly outpacing the average length of non-partner stalking. Further, research demonstrates the profound link between stalking and emotional distress, mental health challenges, and an increased risk of homicide by a former partner.**^{i,ii} Indeed, stalking is often used as a weapon to maintain power in relationships where domestic violence has been central and a person is trying to separate from that partner and can have immense effects on work, financial stability, and mental health.^{ii,iii,iv}

While H7547 currently focuses on crucial safety-related expenses such as changing locks, increased home security, or even relocation, we encourage consideration of including lost wages, counseling, and other costs related to stalking, as these are among the most common and impactful effects of prolonged stalking. A recent study published in the Journal of Interpersonal Violence found that nearly half of all women being stalked by an abusive (ex) partner reported work losses (e.g., being fired, missing work, doing things that made them look bad at work) which had a domino effect on experiences of mental health issues, coercive control, and economic control.^{iv} Access to compensation for these expenses could help survivors maintain employment, attend therapy, and rebuild their lives while recovering from trauma.

House Bill 7547 would allow survivors of stalking to access compensation for practical safety measures such as relocation expenses and security upgrades to their homes. This support is critical for survivors who are attempting to break free from abusive situations and regain control of their safety. Stalking often functions as a tool of power and control in domestic violence, with a domino effect on work, financial stability, and mental health.

For these reasons, Sojourner House strongly supports H7547 and urges the Committee to pass this legislation to ensure stalking survivors in Rhode Island can access the resources they need to protect their safety and recover from the profound emotional and practical impacts of stalking.

ⁱ Stalking & intimate partner violence: Fact sheet. <https://www.stalkingawareness.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Stalking-IPV-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

ⁱⁱ National Network to End Domestic Violence (11 January, 2023) The intersections of stalking and domestic violence. https://nnedv.org/latest_update/intersections-of-stalking-and-domestic-violence/

ⁱⁱⁱ Logan, TK & Showalter, K. (2023). Work harassment and resource loss among (ex)partner stalking victims. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 38(1-2), 1060-1087. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605221086649>

^{iv} Storey, J. E., Pina, A., Williams, C. S. (2023). The impact of stalking and its predictors: Characterizing the needs of stalking victims. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 38(21-22). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605231185303>