



**RE: Testimony in support of H8063, Sexual Assault**

Dear Chair McEntee and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support of House Bill 8063** which would require victim or a victim's parental approval for negotiated plea agreements in cases of first-degree sexual assault and first-degree child molestation.

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.

**Research shows that survivors often do not trust the criminal justice system because of fear of disbelief, low prosecution rates, re-traumatization during reporting, and systemic inequities that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.**<sup>i,ii,iii,iv</sup> Survivors often feel excluded from key decisions about plea agreements, which can leave them feeling powerless and unheard. Legislation that increases victim voice, consultation, and meaningful approval in criminal proceedings like H8063, can help restore trust and ensure that survivors are treated with respect and agency.

This legislation represents a meaningful step in restoring trust in the criminal justice system for survivors. Many states already ensure that victims are notified, consulted, and given the opportunity to express their views before a plea agreement is approved.<sup>v</sup> However, none currently require victim approval as a condition precedent to accepting a plea deal. **H8063 would place Rhode Island at the forefront of victim-centered justice by ensuring that survivors' voices are not only heard but have a tangible impact on case outcomes.**

Rhode Island has a strong history of advocating for victim rights. Under Title 12, Chapter 12-28-4.1, where victims currently have the right to be heard regarding plea agreements. This bill strengthens that right by requiring actual approval from the victim or parent in cases of serious sexual assault, acknowledging the gravity of the offense and the profound impact it has on survivors. Giving survivors this agency affirms their central role in the justice process, improves confidence in legal outcomes, and supports trauma-informed practices.

**Sojourner House supports H8063 and urges the Committee to advance this bill to ensure that survivors of the most serious sexual crimes in Rhode Island are respected, empowered, and meaningfully included in decisions that affect their lives.**

---

<sup>i</sup> Campbell, R., Dworkin, E., & Cabral, G. (2009). An ecological model of the impact of sexual assault on women's mental health. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 10(3), 225–246.

<sup>ii</sup> Fisher, B. S., Daigle, L. E., Cullen, F. T., & Turner, M. G. (2003). Reporting sexual victimization to the police and others: Results from a national-level study of college women. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 30(1), 6–38.

---

<sup>iii</sup> Raj, A., Silverman, J. G., & Amaro, H. (2004). Abuse and risk of femicide among Latinas: Do economic factors increase vulnerability? *Violence Against Women*, 10(8), 880–900.

<sup>iv</sup> Campbell, R. (2006). *Rape survivors' experiences with the legal and medical systems: Do rape victims know what to expect?* *Violence Against Women*, 12(1), 115–139.

<sup>v</sup> Office for Victims of Crime (n.d.). Victim input into plea agreements. Legal Series: Bulletin #7.

[https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/pubs/OVC\\_Archives/bulletins/legalseries/bulletin7/2.html](https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/pubs/OVC_Archives/bulletins/legalseries/bulletin7/2.html)