

Chair Carol H. McEntee
House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House

March 12, 2026



RE: Testimony in support of H8086, Indictments, Information and Complaints

Dear Chair McEntee and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support of House Bill 8086** which seeks to strengthen the statute of limitations for second degree sexual assault by expending the statute of limitations to 10 years and allowing for a moratorium on that clock until a person turns 18 if the abuse happened prior to that.

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.

Experiences of childhood sexual abuse have lasting and deeply difficult effects on survivors. Research shows that childhood sexual abuse is the strongest predictor of adult sexual victimization above any other adverse childhood experience.ⁱ In Rhode Island, a 2025 Kids Count report indicated that there were 87 reports of childhood sexual abuse in our state.ⁱⁱ At Sojourner House in 2025, 17% of our adult clients reported having experienced childhood sexual abuse, or nearly 400 people. The complexity of sexual abuse at any age is tremendously damaging and contributes to short- and long-term negative psychological effects such as posttraumatic stress disorder, suicide attempts, drug abuse, and depression.ⁱⁱⁱ It is an act of complete violation of selfhood that no one should have to endure. As children, with limited capacity to understand the extent of what is happening to them, it can take them many years to come to terms and convey that to others through formal or informal reporting.

Further, given the challenges around reporting experiences of sexual assault and then convicting them through the legal system with frequent barriers to providing sufficient evidence, increasing accountability in second degree sexual assault charges can create a broader system of greater accountability in plea deals for first degree sexual assault cases.^{iv,v,vi} If there is often a lack of sustainable evidence to convict cases of first degree sexual assault, invoking stronger sentencing for second degree sexual assault could provide a legal safety net for those cases of first degree that are not strong enough to be convicted.

House Bill 8086 is aligned with trauma-informed values by recognizing the prevalence of delayed reporting in sexual assault cases, especially among children, and allowing more time for survivor agency in seeking closure through the criminal justice system if they choose. For these reasons, Sojourner House **strongly supports H8086** and we look hope to see this legislation pushed forward by the committee.

ⁱ Ports, K. A., Ford, D. C., & Merrick, M. T. (2017). Adverse childhood experience and sexual victimization in adulthood. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 51, 313-322. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.08.017>

ⁱⁱ Kids Count (2025). Child neglect and abuse. <https://rikidscount.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ChildNeglectandAbuse.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ali, S., Pasha, S. A., & Youssef, E. (2024). Examining the short and long-term impacts of child sexual abuse: A review study. *SN Social Science*, 4(56). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-024-00852-6>

^{iv} 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.

^v 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.

^{vi} 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.