



RE: Testimony in support of H8093, Abused and Neglected Children

Dear Chair McEntee and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support of House Bill 8093** which seeks to expand and strengthen mandatory reporting requirements for child abuse or neglect occurring within or involving education programs and religious organizations.

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.

A Kids Count report indicated that there were 87 reports of childhood sexual abuse in Rhode Island in 2025.ⁱ At Sojourner House in 2025, 17% of our adult clients reported having experienced childhood sexual abuse, or nearly 400 people. From the perspective of organizations that serve survivors of domestic and sexual violence, **early identification and reporting of abuse can be critical for intervention and support to mitigate the subsequent short- and long-term effects.**

Children often interact with trusted adults in many environments outside of traditional public schools, including after-school programs, camps, faith-based schools, and other organized youth activities. These settings are often vital sources of support, mentorship, and stability for young people. Ensuring that staff in these settings are clearly covered by the same expectations and protections as those in traditional schools strengthens Rhode Island's safety net for children.

Recent findings in Rhode Island underscore why strong child protection laws must apply in every setting where adults work with children, including faith-based educational programs. In March 2026, the Rhode Island Attorney General (AG) released the first comprehensive report on clergy sexual abuse in the Diocese of Providence, identifying **75 clergy members who were credibly accused of sexually abusing more than 300 children since 1950.**ⁱⁱ Investigators found that abuse often went unreported to law enforcement and that some accused clergy were transferred to new assignments where they continued to have access to children. The report also concluded that institutional responses frequently prioritized protecting the reputation of the institution rather than the safety of children.

The incidents outlined in the AG report are not isolated incidents but rather represent a pattern of abuse that is common as documented by national and international research.ⁱⁱⁱ Ensuring that all individuals working with children, including those in faith-based educational settings, are clearly subject to child protection and reporting expectations is an important step toward preventing abuse and strengthening accountability in Rhode Island. For these reasons, Sojourner House **strongly supports H8093** and we look hope to see this legislation pushed forward by the committee.

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

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

ⁱⁱⁱ Cocco, E., Hashimoto, Y. Z., & Chopin, J. (2025). Child sexual abuse in the catholic church: A scoping review of characteristics, prevalence, and explanatory factors. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 101. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0047235225001485#s0050>