

January 23, 2026

Written Testimony in Support of Amending R.I. Gen. Laws §11-5-1 (Intent to Murder)

My name is Dr. Emma Lineberger. I am a RI native and survivor of domestic violence and the author of a memoir documenting the long-term realities of survival and recovery. I am submitting written testimony in support of the proposed amendment to Rhode Island General Laws §11-5-1 that would distinguish assault with intent to murder from other felony intents and apply sentencing that reflects the severity of that intent.

When a person survives an assault intended to end their life, survival does not mean the harm was incomplete. Intent to murder carries consequences that extend far beyond the moment of violence. Survivors are often left with lifelong psychological, emotional, and financial burdens that permanently alter their lives.

As a result of the violence committed against me, I was forced to rebuild my life entirely. This included selling my home I worked so hard to buy, leaving my job, my community, and my support system. I now live in a lifelong protection program and am unable to return to live in my hometown for my safety.

The financial impact of this displacement is significant and ongoing, including relocation costs, loss of housing stability, disruption to my grad school education, changing jobs, legal expenses, and long-term safety-related costs that most people never face.

In addition to displacement, survivors of attempted murder often absorb:

- Long-term mental health care costs
- Medical expenses related to trauma
- Lost earning potential due to interrupted education and/or employment
- Often years of missing work to attend court dates.
- Continued financial instability tied directly to safety concerns

These costs are not temporary. They represent a lifelong financial sentence imposed on the victim.

Research from the *Harms After Victimization: Experience & Needs* project, a recent National Institute of Justice–supported analysis finds that long-term harms such as ongoing care needs, mental health impacts, and disability often drive total victim costs to levels far beyond immediate medical expenses, with catastrophic costs concentrated in the most severe cases.

Current law groups intent to murder with intent to commit other felonies, despite the fact that intent to kill is categorically different. From a survivor’s perspective, this distinction matters. The intent was to end a life. The fact that the victim survived does not reduce the severity of that intent or the consequences that follow.

Treating assault with intent to murder under the same sentencing structure as other felony intents fails to account for the lifelong consequences survivors endure when the intent was to kill.

When sentencing fails to meaningfully distinguish intent to murder, the cost of that intent is shifted onto survivors and, by extension, onto communities, healthcare systems, and social services. Recognizing intent to murder as distinct is not about expanding punishment broadly, it is about aligning accountability with the reality survivors live with every day.

I respectfully urge legislators to support this amendment and to recognize that when intent is to kill, justice must reflect the full scope of harm caused, including the lifelong financial and personal costs borne by survivors.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for considering the voices of those directly affected.

Respectfully,

Dr. Emma Lineberger