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Verbal Testimony in Support of 2026 – H 8055 *Amendment to R.I. Gen. Laws §11-5-1*

Chair and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Tara Zorabedian. I am a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker in the State of Rhode Island and a qualified Substance Abuse Professional, with an advanced Graduate Certification in Integrated Behavioral Health. My work in victim services places me in direct clinical partnership with individuals and families impacted by intentional violence. As a seasoned clinician, I provide direct clinical services, clinical supervision to other behavioral health professionals, engage in policy review and development, and collaborate across systems through active membership in community initiatives. I offer this background to underscore my comprehensive, practice-informed understanding of the clinical, systemic, and community-wide consequences of intentional violence across our state.

Tonight, I am here as a sister. In 2017, my sister survived attempted murder.

On March 5, 2017, my then 18-year-old sister, a high school senior, Alyssa Garcia, was stabbed more than 27 times by a man who admitted he intended to kill the first person he saw. He

purchased a butcher's knife in advance at a Coventry Walmart. He drove to Warwick. He entered a quiet neighborhood store. He walked past other adult males. He deliberately selected my sister — her back turned, changing tags in a cooler — and carried out a premeditated, sustained attack.

The investigation confirmed it.

His confession confirmed it.

The court confirmed it.

This was proven intent to commit murder without a reasonable doubt. Yet, still my sister was not granted legal justice or protections proportionate to the violent and deliberate attempt on her life. Frankly, this is unacceptable.

The only reason my sister is not a homicide victim is because she survived — due to her will to fight, the bravery of bystanders, the rapid response of first responders, and the extraordinary trauma care at Rhode Island Hospital. For that, we are eternally grateful.

Until that day, I was blissfully unaware that Rhode Island does not have a standalone attempted murder statute. Under current R.I. Gen. Laws §11-5-1, assault with intent to commit murder carries a minimum sentence as low as one year. One year — for proven intent to take a life.

And because parole eligibility occurs after one-third of a sentence, survivors can be required to reappear, to retell, to relive their trauma — again and again.

This is a significant limitation in the law. In the event of horrific crimes such as this, prosecutors do not have appropriate sentencing tools.

This bill is not about charging decisions. It is not about lowering burdens of proof. Intent must still be proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

House Bill 2026 – H --8055 is narrowly tailored for proven intent-to-kill cases.

It does not create a new crime.

It does not change evidentiary standards.

It does not eliminate rehabilitation.

It does not roll back criminal justice reform.

It:

- Establishes a 10-year mandatory minimum for proven intent-to-kill cases
- Increases the statutory maximum to 40 years for proven intent-to-kill cases
- Eliminates suspension, deferment, and probation for proven intent-to-kill cases

AGAIN, only in proven beyond a reasonable doubt intent-to-kill cases.

It applies only after conviction, when lethal intent has been established in a court of law.

Intent matters.

Two defendants with identical intent and conduct should not face dramatically different sentencing exposure solely because one victim survived. Outcome should not eclipse intent.

As a clinician, I understand trauma through research and neurobiology. I understand post-traumatic stress, hypervigilance,

somatic memory, and how the nervous system encodes life-threatening events.

As a sister of a survivor of attempted murder, I live it.

Eight years later, when we hear sirens — police, ambulance, fire — our bodies react before our minds do. My heart races. My chest tightens. My stomach drops.

And without fail, we text each other:

“Is everyone okay?”

“Where are you?”

Every single time.

That is trauma stored in the body — not only hers, but ours as a family. I wish I could explain the exhaustion I experience from the constant hypervigilance.

And then there is the secondary trauma imposed by repeated legal exposure.

Each parole proceeding requires preparation of statements. Graphic recollection. Public vulnerability. Justification for continued accountability. Each hearing amplifies hypervigilance. Each notice disrupts stability.

Research is clear: survivors of intentional violent crime experience elevated rates of chronic PTSD, depression, anxiety, and functional impairment. Families experience secondary trauma. First responders and clinicians experience vicarious trauma. Communities absorb fear.

When sentencing does not proportionately reflect proven lethal intent, survivors are effectively given a second sentence — one of prolonged uncertainty and repeated retraumatization.

This bill changes that. Unfortunately, the State of Rhode Island can not control the actions of offenders nor could I. It is my hope that the majority of individuals are not planning to attempt murder. However, unfortunately, I now understand the legal gap in survivor protections in the event of an attempted murder case. Supporting this amendment addresses that gap and eliminates the secondary trauma imposed by continued legal proceedings for survivors of attempted murder.

When someone purchases a weapon, selects a victim, and acts with demonstrated lethal intent, proportional accountability protects communities, strengthens survivor stability, and strengthens public confidence in the justice system.

Greater sentencing clarity reduces the frequency of retraumatizing legal cycles and allows healing to occur without constant procedural re-engagement.

And let me state this clearly:

This amendment does not change my sister's case. She is advocating voluntarily, putting herself back into public testimony not for personal benefit, but to protect future victims she will deeply empathize with, but may never meet. **That is civic courage.**

Before 2017, I did not know this statutory gap existed. Once I did, I could not ignore it. As a social worker, I am ethically bound to advocate for policies that protect vulnerable individuals and promote human well-being. I researched, I consulted with legal professionals, survivors, colleagues, Leadership at Brown Health, the only level one trauma center in the State of Rhode Island and Dr. Reamer, the Globally Renowned Expert of Ethical Decision Making. I am proud to say, this bill has the full support

of all I consulted with. They see the clear gap in the law, the impact it has on survivors of attempted murder and appreciate how the bill is crafted for specific cases in which intent to commit murder is proven without a reasonable doubt.

Balanced justice and proportional accountability are not opposing values. Rehabilitation can coexist with sentencing structures that reflect the gravity of proven lethal intent.

The State of Rhode Island should not send the message that survival reduces accountability.

You have before you a narrow, precise correction to a clear statutory deficiency.

This matters for public safety.
It matters for survivor healing.
It matters for community trust.

I respectfully can not urge you enough to support House Bill 2026 – H-- 8055. The only individuals who should be opposed to this bill are individuals who are planning to attempt murder.

Thank you for your time and consideration.