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Member Agencies

Blackstone Valley
Advocacy Center

Domestic Violence
Resource Center of
South County

Elizabeth Buffum
Chace Center

Women's Resource Center

Task Force

Sisters Overcoming
Abusive Relationships

Affiliate Members

Center for Southeast Asians

Crossroads Rhode Island

Family Service of Rhode Island

McAuley Ministries –
McAuley Village

Progreso Latino

YWCA Rhode Island

To: Representative Carol Hagan McEntee, Chair of the House Judiciary Committee
Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Lucy Rios, Executive Director
RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Date: April 9, 2026

Re: **Support for House Bill 8328, Virtual/Remote Hearings in RI Courts**

On behalf of our network of member agencies and SOAR (Sisters Overcoming Abusive Relationships), our taskforce of survivors, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) appreciates this opportunity **to support House Bill 8328. This bill would permit all Rhode Island courts to conduct hearings remotely** and allow any party or attorney to appear by telephone or video conference, with remote appearances having the same legal effect as in-person appearances.

Fully allowing the safety and peace of mind that remote hearings provide to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault would be transformational for survivors in our state.

Both survivors we work with and domestic abuse and sexual violence advocates in Rhode Island share with us the fear and severe anxiety that survivors experience when forced to be physically in the same courtroom as the abusive, violent perpetrator for a hearing. Allowing remote hearings as a standard judicial practice, as done in other states and jurisdictions, would bring an immense amount of safety and ease to survivors that must testify in domestic violence-related hearings and appearances in court.

Passage of this legislation will also make the difficult job of a domestic violence advocate easier, providing great peace of mind for the many clients they serve daily in our courts. The RI Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy Program provides direct assistance to victims of domestic violence and sexual violence with navigating District Court cases and assistance with applying for civil restraining orders in Family Court and District Court. These life-saving services help survivors when the abuser has been arrested and when the victim needs a protective order for themselves or their children, even without a criminal arrest. Advocates are available at every RI courthouse to provide support and empower survivors of intimate partner violence. The court advocate will explain the rights to the survivor, as a victim of a crime, and what to expect in the often-complex court process. The advocate can also help convey wishes to the prosecutors or other court personnel and help guide the survivor through the legal system.

In 2025, over 2,700 victims received support from a court advocate in obtaining a restraining order in District or Family Court. The many hundreds of Rhode Island survivors who rely on these tireless court advocates will be safer if this bill passes.

The RICADV's statewide network of member agencies provide lifesaving advocacy services to victims of domestic and sexual violence every day in our courts. Passage of this bill would help them in their work to bring safety, healing and the hope of a violence-free life to the clients they serve. **We urge you to pass this legislation this year.**