

Roberta DiMezza

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Chair McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Brigid Newman, and I am a resident of Exeter, Rhode Island. I am writing today as a mother, a neighbor, and an advocate for survivors.

A few weeks ago, a Level 3 sex offender moved in next door to me. I have three young daughters. Naturally, I was alarmed. I contacted his probation officer to understand more about his crimes and the conditions of his supervision.

During that conversation, I learned something that stopped me cold. One of his victims lives just one street away. I asked how that was possible - because **Rhode Island has no law restricting where a convicted sex offender can live in proximity to their own victim.**

Let me say that again, because I want this committee to hear it clearly: in our state, right now, there are survivors of sexual assault who are forced to share an apartment building with the person who violated them. They cannot walk to the mailbox, take out their trash, or look out their front window without fear of seeing their attacker. That is not justice. That is not acceptable.

Laws exist to protect the most vulnerable among us, that includes survivors of sexual assault. They cannot undo what happened to them. But we — this body — have the power to give them something meaningful in return: the basic security of their own home and their own neighborhood.

I am personally grateful to the brave young woman in my neighborhood. Her courage in coming forward, pressing charges, and seeing that prosecution through put a dangerous person behind bars. Her actions triggered the community notification that alerted my family to the threat next door. She protected us. The least Rhode Island can do is protect her in return.

Rhode Island is one of only a few states in the country that ZERO resident restrictions in relation to victims. We can do better.

H 8502 does not ask for the impossible. It asks for what is reasonable: that a person convicted of a sexual offense not be permitted to live within 1,000 feet of their victim — and that the highest-risk offenders, Level 3s, be kept at least one mile away. This is not about punishment. **This is about protection.**

This legislation strikes a workable balance, protecting victims without the unintended consequences of overly broad bans that push offenders into homelessness and off the registry entirely. H 8502 is drafted with that same balance in mind. The exclusion zones are specific to the victim, not a blanket prohibition on entire communities. Courts retain discretion. This is thoughtful, targeted legislation.

I urge this committee to pass H 8502 and give every survivor in Rhode Island what they deserve: the peace of mind to live in their own home without fear.

We cannot erase their pain. But we can refuse to add to it.

Thank you.

Brigid Newman
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