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

Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Kathy McCormick

Date: May 19, 2026

Re: **A Survivor's Support for House Bill 7199, RI Survivor Early Lease Termination Act**

As a Rhode Islander and as a survivor myself, I appreciate this opportunity to voice my strong support for House Bill 7199, the RI Survivor Early Lease Termination Act. This survivor safety bill would provide crucial housing protections for victims and their children fleeing abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. It will allow eligible survivors to terminate their lease early for safety reasons, without incurring fees or penalties. It would make this process clear, with required tenant-victim documentation for eligibility provided to landlords. This bill would also enable survivors with the necessary documentation to be allowed to lock-change at their apartment, at the tenant's expense.

A strong coalition of Rhode Island survivors, domestic and sexual violence victim service providers, and advocates came together to champion this bill, based on similar laws from our neighboring northeast and New England states, all of whom already have this safe housing law.

This legislation is necessary to provide safety for Rhode Islanders in desperate need. I know because I have experienced this personally.

As a Rhode Islander and as a survivor myself, I appreciate this opportunity to voice my strong support for House Bill 7199, the RI Survivor Early Lease Termination Act. My name is Kathy McCormick. I am a mother, a grandmother and a wife. I am a board member of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, a domestic violence court advocate in Washington County, a member of SOAR and a survivor of domestic violence.



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As a survivor my story is a familiar one for many who have escaped a violent relationship. The relationship spiraled out of control fast but getting out of this relationship was extremely dangerous and it took over 4 years before I was out and felt relatively safe.

I moved to a new apartment, got a new job and left no forwarding address. By this time, I had a child and no money. I was unable to get any childcare assistance or child support because doing that would put me in danger. I could not provide any personal information for fear of being found and that was a requirement back then.

My main goal after leaving that abusive relationship was to work hard and provide for my son. I was determined to be independent and self-sufficient. The years that followed were incredibly challenging—having survived beatings, threats, damage to my vehicle, multiple break-ins, stalking, and relentless intimidation, I was resolute that I would do whatever I could to keep us safe. But I soon learned just how difficult that would be.

The stalking was, without a doubt, the most terrifying part of my experience. My limited finances meant that I could only afford a third-floor apartment on Academy Ave in Providence. Each day, I was forced to park my unreliable car across the street in a paid lot since on-street parking was unavailable. Every night, I lived with the constant fear of the gang that had moved in next door, compounded by the anxiety that my abuser might find me at any time.

Navigating from my parking spot to my apartment was a daily ordeal. Whether I was carrying groceries, laundry, or anything else, I was always on high alert—looking over my shoulder, my heart racing as I crossed Academy Ave with my son. I gripped his hand tightly, urging him to hurry and sometimes even scaring him with the urgency in my voice. My fear was palpable, and he could sense my tension as I rushed inside and locked the door behind us, desperate for a momentary sense of safety.

One day, we returned home to find that my third-floor apartment had been broken into. The jar of coins I had been saving for emergencies was gone, along with a few other items. What frightened me the most was not knowing who had entered my home. Had he found me? Was this some kind of warning? Was I truly safe anymore? The uncertainty was overwhelming, and I knew I needed to get out. I packed up and stayed with my parents for a few days, but I desperately wanted to move somewhere new. Unfortunately, I was locked



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into my lease and simply couldn't afford to break it. When I explained my fears and the situation to my landlord, he showed no concern for my safety or finances. Instead, he threatened legal action if I left without paying, and I knew that would ruin the credit I had worked so hard to rebuild after leaving my abuser. I felt trapped. If I ever wanted to own a home for myself and my child, I couldn't risk damaging my credit again because of this situation. On top of that, I didn't have enough money for a new apartment's first and last month's rent unless my landlord returned my security deposit—and he refused. I was forced to make an impossible choice between our immediate safety and our future stability. In the end, I gambled with our lives just to protect our future, a decision no one should ever have to make.

My story is more common than you know. I struggled every day, and I was very vigilant about my safety and my son's safety, but I still had many close calls and spent years constantly looking over my shoulder.

It took time, but slowly and surely, I began to rebuild my life. When my son was eight years old, I was finally able to buy a new home. Despite this progress, the fear and trauma from living in an unsafe place lingered. I remember the constant anxiety, wondering every day if he had found me, if he would show up and follow through on his threats to kill me or take my child to punish me. Each day was a struggle to find some peace and hope that we would live long enough to do so.

As you can see, by the grace of God, I have survived. Yet I remain convinced that my landlord could have easily found a new tenant without difficulty, allowing my son and me to escape the threat that haunted us. Instead, because money was more important to him than our safety, we were forced to stay, exposed to the real possibility of being murdered by a man who had threatened my life—a man who was later sentenced to 50 years in prison for rape and conspiracy to commit murder. I lived in constant terror, forced to remain in harm's way because my landlord chose profit over our lives.

I urge you to pass this bill so that no one will ever make that choice again. Everyone deserves to live free of violence and fear and we should all feel a sense of responsibility for the victims that still need our help.

Let's stop risking lives on the pretense that landlords will not be able rent these apartments if a victim leaves as the result of a domestic violence situation. A victim's



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life, sense of safety and financial stability should have more value than anyone's bottom line.

Thank you for your consideration. I urge you to pass this bill this year to provide safety and financial and housing security for Rhode Island families.