

Testimony in Support of H7199 – Survivor Early Lease Termination

Dear Chair McEntee and Honorable Committee Members:

My name is Meaghan White, and I am writing today as a social worker working in RI, and a member of the National Association of Social Workers Rhode Island Chapter (NASW-RI) Policy and Advocacy Committee. I strongly urge you to support House Bill 7199 relating to survivor early lease termination. This bill is pivotal to ensuring the safety of survivors escaping violence, stalking, threats, and other forms of abuse to themselves and their children by giving survivors an option for leaving without putting themselves at greater risk for eviction, debt, homelessness, and/or risk of continued harm because of abuse.

Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children. According to statistics 38% of all domestic violence victims become homeless at some point in their lifetime. Furthermore, one quarter of homeless children have witnessed violence, and 70% of mothers in homeless families reported being physically assaulted by a family member or someone they knew.¹ One of the most dangerous times for a victim of domestic violence is when they begin to escape the abuse because perpetrators of domestic violence often escalate their abusive tactics as they start to lose control over the victim. Based on statistics reported by the United States Dept of Justice, 75% of homicide victims and 85% of women who experienced severe but non-fatal domestic violence had left or tried to leave their abuser within the past year.² House Bill 7199 would provide crucial safety options for victims fleeing violence.

This bill aligns with the federal Violence Against Women Act and creates a safety-focused option for survivors to leave without burdening them further with potential long-term housing consequences. 41 states have similar housing protections for survivors of abuse Rhode Island is currently an outlier in New England and in the U.S. as a whole. On a single day in the fall of 2025, 78% of victim service providers in Rhode Island provided support services related to housing/landlord concerns.³ This statistic further demonstrates the need for Rhode Island to pass survivor early lease termination in our state. Passing this bill would add Rhode Island to that list of states protecting victims of abuse from potentially deadly violent situations.

For all of these reasons, I am in strong support of House Bill 7199 and strongly urge passage of this bill as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely, Meaghan White

NASW of RI Policy and Advocacy Committee

¹ Homelessness Among Abuse Survivors: A Deepening Crisis. *SAFE Alliance*. (2026). Retrieved from <https://www.safeaustin.org/homelessness-among-abuse-survivors-a-deepening-crisis/>

² Does It Really 'End With Us'? Why The End Of An Abusive Relationship Is The Most Dangerous Time For The Survivor. *Forbes*. (2025). Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/patriciafersch/2025/01/07/does-it-really-end-with-us/>

³ 20th Annual Domestic Violence Counts Report Rhode Island Summary. *National Network to End Domestic Violence*. (2026). Retrieved from <https://nnedv.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/20th-Annual-DV-Counts-Report-Rhode-Island-Summary.pdf>