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

Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Robyn Giragosian

Date: May 19, 2026

Re: Support for House Bill 7199, Survivor Early Lease Termination

Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence appreciates this opportunity to support House Bill 7199, sponsored by Representative Karen Alzate. This survivor safety bill would provide crucial 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 a lock-change at their apartment, at the tenant's expense. We have heard from many victims in RI who need these options.

A 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 New England states, all of whom already have this safe housing law.

Key provisions of the Survivor Early Lease Termination Act include:

- A prohibition on evictions, fees, and other penalties for abuse survivors who terminate their lease to flee for their safety.
- A prohibition on landlords disclosing confidential information obtained from survivors.
- A variety of methods survivors can use to verify their status with written documentation,



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including self-certification as found in other RI domestic abuse safety laws.

41 states already have early lease termination laws for survivors, with New Hampshire joining this list in May 2024. 19 states have tenant lock-change laws for survivors.

My name is Robyn. I am a mother and a survivor. I'm also a member of Sisters Overcoming Abusive Relationships, a survivor task force of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence. My story is not unique and because no one should have to survive what my children and I did just to stay alive. I was in an abusive relationship for nearly ten years. I entered that relationship with three children, believing I was building a family. Over time, the abuse grew — first quietly, then loudly, and eventually violently. Control over money, over my choices, and especially over housing became the way I was kept trapped.

The home my children and I lived in was owned by my abuser's family. That fact was used against me every day. I was told that if I spoke up or tried to leave, my children and I would have nothing. And when I finally left, that threat became real.

We lost our home. My abuser destroyed or ruined nearly all of our belongings. My children and I left with only the clothes we were wearing. In a single moment, we lost our housing, our possessions, and the sense of safety every child deserves. This is one of many ways housing insecurity comes to survivors, but many survivors experience not being able to change locks to feel safe, being stuck in a lease that they can't break without penalties, or that their abuser is also tied to.

When violence became life-threatening, fleeing was the only option. My children and I had nowhere to go but a hotel. For nearly two months, that hotel room was our home while I worked with victim service advocates to find safety and stability. Every day was uncertain. Every night, I wondered how long I could keep my children sheltered.

Those weeks taught me how deeply housing and safety are connected. Leaving abuse didn't end the fear — housing insecurity extended it.



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But too many survivors never get that chance.

I'm able to speak up today because victim service advocates stood beside me when I had nothing — when the path forward was unclear and the risks were overwhelming.

They helped me survive, and they helped my children begin to heal. But support alone is not enough when the law itself traps survivors. The RI Survivor Early Lease Termination Act would remove one of the biggest barriers to safety by allowing survivors to leave dangerous housing without risking homelessness, debt, or retaliation. This law could change everything for survivors like me. No one should ever choose between staying in danger of losing their home. And no parent should have to explain to their children that choosing safety is the reason they no longer have one.

We thank you for your consideration and urge you to pass the bill this year.