



RE: Testimony in support of The Early Lease Termination Act, H7199

Dear Chair McEntee and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Sojourner House of Rhode Island, I am writing in strong support of **H7199**, which aligns with our commitment of supporting survivors of domestic and sexual violence (DV/SV) that is attuned to the specific barriers that often plague survivors of DV/SV. As a prominent non-profit organization in Rhode Island serving over 5,000 number of clients in 2025 almost all cities and towns across our state, we are well positioned to speak to the needs of survivors of domestic and sexual violence and the timeliness of **H7199** in attempting to address some of those needs.

H7199 seeks to provide renters experiencing DV/SV in Rhode Island with an avenue to request lock changes on their homes (at the renter's expense) or to end their lease early without facing the typical economic penalties by allowing certifications of abuse from clinicians, DV non-profit organizations, the Secretary of State, and more to serve as evidence. The bill also instills essential protections against future discrimination in renting as a result of ending a lease early. Finally, this bill serves as an important step in removing systemic barriers that make living a life free from violence unattainable to those experiencing domestic and sexual violence which promotes the safety and wellbeing of our Rhode Island communities.

Research consistently shows that the majority (94-99%) of domestic and sexual violence victims have been economically victimized and that this victimization is most common among people from lower-income households and neighborhoods with fewer resources.^{i,ii,iii} Given that housing is often the number one barrier to individuals being able to leave abusive relationships, **H7199's** goal of limiting the economic cost of fleeing abuse is a crucial step in ensuring that preventable structural policies don't remain barriers to survivor's safety.^{iv,v,vi} The 2025 Housing Works Rhode Island Housing Fact Book suggests that in Rhode Island, we have a particularly unique opportunity to support individuals facing abuse as we have a very *tight* rental market.^{vii} Specifically, we have a vacancy rate of only 3.6% compared to a healthy rental rate between 5-8%.^{iv} This means that landlords likely face few difficulties in filling vacancies in a short amount of time especially in many areas across the state that are still behind the 10% threshold for affordable housing.^{iv} Therefore, we are in a position to support survivors without negative repercussions to our housing providers. Further, the bill allows for increased protection to landlords by providing a means to increase tenant safety, limiting potential expenses related property damage from abuse and limiting community violence, police, and other safety interventions on their rental property sites.

H7199 represents a significant investment in policy action by the state on behalf of some of our most vulnerable community members. Ensuring that we increase accessible resources to those fleeing domestic violence is essential but without policy change that works to remove barriers limiting the success of these resource interventions, our efforts fall short of intended impact leaving community members including children left to live another day in violent homes.

On behalf of Sojourner House, one of Rhode Island's leading domestic and sexual violence non-profit organizations, we respectfully urge you to support this H7199 to help build safer communities and pathways forward for survivors in our state.

-
- ⁱ Fanning, P. (n.d.). Recognizing financial abuse: A growing weapon in intimate partner violence. University of Maryland School of Social Work. <https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/fall-2024-connections/alumni-and-faculty-making-an-impact-in-ipv/recognizing-financial-abuse-a-growing-weapon-in-intimatepartner-violence/>
- ⁱⁱ National Network to End Domestic Violence (n.d.). About financial abuse. <https://nnedv.org/content/about-financial-abuse/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Bonomi, A. E., Trabert, B., Anderson, M. L., Kernic, M. A., & Holt, V. L. (2014). Intimate partner violence and neighborhood income: A longitudinal analysis. *Violence Against Women*, 20(1), 42-58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801213520580>
- ^{iv} National Low Income Housing Coalition (2020, June 10). Domestic violence. <https://nlihc.org/resource/domestic-violence>
- ^v Pavao, J., Alvarez, J., Baumrind, N., Induni, M., & Kimerling, R. (2007). Intimate partner violence and housing instability. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 32(2), 143-146. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2006.10.008> ^{vi} Zapata, A. Wood, L. G., Galvin, A. M., Chan, W., Thomas, T. A., Tsai, J., Way, H. K., Mueller, E. J., & Hernandez, D. C. (2025). Domains of housing instability and intimate partner violence risk among U.S. tenants. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 22, 1212. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph22081212> ^{vii} Housing Works Rhode Island (2025, July). 2025 Housing Fact Book. https://stdidhousingworksriprod.blob.core.windows.net/housingworksri/documents/Housing-Fact-Books/HWRI_HFB25.pdf