

Chair Stephen M. Casey
House Municipal Government
and Housing Committee
Rhode Island State House

March 31, 2026



RE: Testimony in support of H7445, H8015, and H8142, Affordable Housing

Dear Chair Casey and Members of the Committee:

Our testimony today is in support of H7445, H8015, and H8142, which seeks to advance a variety of interventions in increase affordable housing solutions in our state.

For 50 years, Sojourner House, a non-profit based in Providence but now providing services across the state, has served thousands of victims and survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and human trafficking. We offer wraparound services such as support groups, emergency shelter, transitional and permanent supportive housing, sexual health advocacy, and emotional support.

Research shows that stable, affordable housing is a foundational need for survivors of domestic violence and related exploitation, significantly improving safety, well-being, and long-term stability.^{i,ii,iii,iv} Studies of the Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) model prioritizing safe housing access and flexible supports find that survivors who secure stable housing experience greater housing stability and reduced re-abuse over 6-12 months compared with those receiving standard services, underscoring how critical housing is to breaking cycles of violence and homelessness.^v Additionally, research with survivor populations highlights that safe, affordable, and stable housing is often the first and most urgent priority for survivors leaving abusive situations and can be the key that makes all other aspects of recovery from employment to mental health possible. Legislation that expands affordable units, streamlines approvals, and leverages adaptive reuse (like H7445, H8015, and H8142) therefore directly aligns with evidence showing that housing access is not optional but essential to survivors' safety and recovery.

The three bills we write in support of each take a different but necessary approach to expanding our tools aimed at addressing affordable housing in Rhode Island. **We respectfully urge support for H7445, H8015, and H8142, as each addresses critical gaps in housing access that directly affect survivors of domestic violence, and human trafficking.** Survivors often face urgent needs for safe, affordable, and accessible housing. H7445 leverages underused faith-based properties for affordable units, H8015 recognizes accessory dwelling units as affordable housing in towns and cities that don't have minimum lot size standards, and H8142 incentivizes adaptive reuse of vacant buildings for residential purposes. Together, these bills expand the supply of flexible, quickly deployable housing, helping survivors secure stable, safe homes while rebuilding their lives. Prioritizing survivor housing within these programs ensures Rhode Island meets both urgent safety needs and long-term recovery goals.

ⁱ Sullivan, C. M., Guerrero, M., Simmons, C., Lopez-Zeron, G., Oluwafunmilayo Ayeni, O., Farero, A., Chiaramonte, D., & Sprecher, M. (2023). Impact of the domestic violence housing first model on survivors' safety and housing stability: 12-month findings. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 38(5-6), 4790-4813. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605221119520>

ⁱⁱ National Low Income Housing Coalition (2020, June 10). Domestic violence. <https://nlihc.org/resource/domestic-violence>

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- ^{iv} 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>
- ^v Clough, A., Draughon, J. E., Njie-Carr, V., Rollins, C., & Glass, N. (2014). "Having housing made everything else possible": Affordable, safe and stable housing for women survivors of violence. *Qualitative Social Work*, 13(5), 671-688. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325013503003>