

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

March 31, 2026



Dear Chair Casey and Honorable Members of the Committee:

We write in support of House Bill 7491 which would authorize the City of Providence to issue up to \$25 million in general obligation bonds to capitalize the Providence Housing Trust Fund in support of the development of affordable, multi-family housing.

Nearly 1 in 2 Rhode Island women and 2 in 5 Rhode Island men experience domestic violence in their lifetimes and research shows that rates of domestic violence homicides are rising.^{i,ii} ⁱⁱⁱ Further, **housing remains the number one barrier to finding safety outside of a violent relationship** and the lack of available housing contributing to homelessness can lead to further sexual victimization and abuse.^{iv,v,vi}

Complicating this, despite reaching 10% affordable housing in Providence, nearly half of all renters remain cost burdened and only 13% of Providence residents can afford the median housing cost.^{vii} Additionally, there are only about 30 available units for every 100 extremely low-income renters in Rhode Island meaning 70% of extremely low-income Rhode Islanders struggle to secure stable, appropriate, and affordable housing.^{vii,viii}

This context is particularly important for survivors of domestic violence who disproportionately come from low-income backgrounds and often also face damaged credit, limited savings, and urgent financial needs due to economic abuse while trying to secure safety.^{ix,x} **Last year, nearly half of our clients came from the city of Providence with the majority being low- or extremely-low income at intake.** Increasing the amount of affordable housing in the city of Providence can increase survivors' ability to secure housing and a safe future in the midst of a market that is unfriendly to them.

The impact that this direct funding has on residents in Providence cannot be overstated—it is essential part of strengthening affordable housing in our city. **In 2024, Sojourner House was a direct recipient of the Providence Housing Trust Fund. With the money we received, we were able to secure more permanent affordable housing for people experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.**

Like municipalities across the state and country, Providence is facing serious housing challenges, and the Providence Housing Trust Fund has been a key part of Providence's strategy to address these challenges. The Trust Fund has proven effective in accelerating projects, unlocking hundreds of millions of dollars in private and federal investment in the Capital City. Local support signals community backing, helps projects meet matching or leverage goals, and can close crucial last funding gaps that are so often the deciding factors in whether a project gets built. Funding has helped support more than 1,600 affordable housing units, substantially increasing the available Low- and Moderate- Income Housing supply in the City. Continued investment in the Providence Housing Trust Fund is essential to sustain the momentum that Providence has built in addressing the housing challenges facing Providence residents.

We thank the sponsor of this bill and **urge the committee to vote in favor of House Bill 7491** to capitalize the Providence Housing Trust Fund.

ⁱ Berker, M. (2025, Sept 12). Nearly 5.4M Americans reported domestic violence in 5 years, homicides doubled since 2019. Anadolu Ajansi. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/nearly-54m-americans-reported-domestic-violence-in-5-years-homicides-doubled-since-2019/3766229#>

ⁱⁱ Housing Works Rhode Island (2025, July). 2025 Housing Fact Book.

https://stdidhousingworksriprod.blob.core.windows.net/housingworksri/documents/Housing-Fact-Books/HWRI_HFB25.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control (December, 2023). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 State Report.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/NISVS-2016-2017-State-Report-508.pdf>

^{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

^{viii} Community Housing Network (2023, October 30). Domestic violence survivors face a silent crisis due to lack of affordable housing.

[https://communityhousingnetwork.org/domestic-violence-survivors-face-a-silent-crisis-due-to-lack-of-affordable-housing/#:~:text=For%20every%20100%20extremely%20low%2Dincome%20renter%20households%2C,the%20National%20Low%20Income%20Housing%20Coalition%20\(NLIHC\)](https://communityhousingnetwork.org/domestic-violence-survivors-face-a-silent-crisis-due-to-lack-of-affordable-housing/#:~:text=For%20every%20100%20extremely%20low%2Dincome%20renter%20households%2C,the%20National%20Low%20Income%20Housing%20Coalition%20(NLIHC))

^{ix} 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-intimate-partner-violence-/#:~:text=Two%20frequently%20cited%20studies%20of.78%20percent%20reported%20employment%20sabotage>

^x National Network to End Domestic Violence (n.d.). About financial abuse. <https://nnedv.org/content/about-financial-abuse/#:~:text=Research%20indicates%20that%20financial%20abuse,returning%20to%20an%20abusive%20partner>