



**RE: Testimony in support of Governor's Proposed FY27 Budget, Housing and Homeownership**

**Dear Chair DiPalma and Members of the Committee:**

Our testimony today concerns the Governor's proposed FY27 Budget H7127, Article 6, Question 2, which seeks to advance stable, affordable, and long-term housing solutions. **We thank the Governor for putting in this bond question, but urge the committee to increase the amount to \$150,000,000 to support affordable housing production and preservation of housing for low- and moderate-income households.**

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. We believe that everyone deserves a safe, healthy home, and proudly house all genders.

Due to our work, we are too familiar with the fact that access to safe, secure housing is often a barrier for a victim to flee from an abusive situation. Knowing this, and recognizing the shortage of affordable housing in our community, Sojourner House made the decision in 2020 to begin housing development work of our own. **Since then, we've made five real estate transactions and currently own or lease over 175 units statewide.** This allows us to provide permanent supportive housing to victims, as we know this is the most effective way to help victims and their families transition out of very dangerous situations into safety.

The lack of affordable housing has real world impacts on the clients we serve. **Unfortunately, last year we were unable to support almost 90%, or 1500 people who come to us seeking housing to flee abuse.** When people attempt to leave or seek help with abusive relationships, it is typically at times when the violence has escalated significantly.<sup>i</sup> Research shows that the rates at which people return to their abusive households increases as the lack of supportive and affordable housing available decreases.<sup>ii</sup> Being brave enough to attempt to leave or ask for help for the first time without the appropriate resources available in our communities leaves people at substantial risk of experiencing increased violence and even losing their lives at the hands of their abusers.<sup>iii</sup>

The more stable, permanent housing options we can provide for families to rebuild their lives, the more successful we can become in breaking the cycle of abuse that often forces victims to return to an abusive situation. While we have been able to purchase housing with funding from a combination of state support, federal grants and individual donations, we often find it difficult to find housing stock to purchase. And we know that our clients are struggling even more to find permanent affordable housing. There is just not enough on the market that our clients – most of whom are very low income and working to rebuild their lives – can afford. Rhode Island must increase the stock of low-income affordable housing – it really is a matter of life and death for our clients.

Thank you for your time and review of this testimony, and for your continued efforts to support access to affordable housing in Rhode Island. **Please pass a \$150,000,000 housing bond to increase affordable and safe housing for the most vulnerable Rhode Islanders.**

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<sup>i</sup> Mayock, P. & Neary, F. (2025). "Where am I going to go tonight? Where am I literally going to go?": Exploring the dynamics of domestic violence and family homelessness. *Journal of Family Violence*, 40, 987-1002. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00667-8>

<sup>ii</sup> Melbin, Sullivan, & Cain, 2003 IN Ponc, P., Varcoe, C., Davies, L., Ford-Gilboe, M., Wuest, J., & Hammerton, J. (2011). Leaving ≠ moving: Housing patterns of women who have left an abusive partner. *Violence Against Women*, 17(12), 1576-1600. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801211436163>

<sup>iii</sup> Campbell, J. C., Webster, D., Koziol-McLain, J., Block, C., Campbell, D., Curry, M. A., Gary, F., Glass, N., McFarlane, J., Sachs, C., Sharps, P., Ulrich, Y., Wilt, S. A., Manganello, J., Schollenberger, J., Frye, V., & Loughton, K. (2003). Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: Results from a multisite case control study. In *Domestic Violence* (pp. 135-143).