



RE: Testimony in support of S2083—Healthy School Meals for All

Dear Chair DiPalma and Members of the Committee:

Our testimony today is submitted to **express strong support for S2083**. This bill is a critical step toward ensuring food access for the most vulnerable Rhode Islanders. Ensuring equitable access to food is tied explicitly to our priorities as a non-profit agency aimed at addressing the needs of survivors in Rhode Island.

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.

Child poverty rates in Rhode Island are reported to be the highest in all of the New England states and has been increasing in recent years.ⁱ Further, in Rhode Island, about **36.9% of households spend 30% or more of their income on housing costs**, including rent or mortgage and utilities, which is considered “cost-burdened.”ⁱⁱ This burden means less money is available for food, healthcare, transportation, and other basic needs. Cost of living burden is especially high among low-income households.ⁱⁱⁱ Survivors of domestic violence are disproportionately impacted by economic insecurity as most come from low-income backgrounds and experience economic abuse and frequently face financial abuse.^{iv,v,vi}

As the rates of childhood poverty increase, it becomes increasingly difficult for survivors to seek safety outside of abusive relationships when they may be left choosing between extreme poverty and not being able to feed their children or staying in an abusive relationship that risks their safety but keeps their children fed.

Survivors need policies that recognize the economic dimensions of safety, not just the immediate physical protections. S2083 represents a practical, compassionate approach to easing one of the financial burdens that many survivors face, and it aligns with best practices in domestic violence advocacy that prioritize long-term stability and autonomy.

On behalf of Sojourner House, we respectfully urge you to **SUPPORT** Senate Bill 2083 to help ensure survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking are supported in rebuilding their lives after abuse and exploitation by strengthening public safety nets in the face of exacerbated costs for basic necessities. No one should have to choose between enduring violence or risking not being able to feed their children.

ⁱ Castro, A. (18 Sept., 2025). More Rhode Island children lived in poverty in 2024, new data shows. *Rhode Island Current*.

<https://rhodeislandcurrent.com/2025/09/18/more-rhode-island-children-lived-in-poverty-in-2024-new-data-shows/>

ⁱⁱ USA Facts (n.d.). How many households in Rhode Island spend too much on housing? <https://usafacts.org/answers/how-many-households-in-the-united-states-spend-too-much-on-housing/state/rhode-island/>

ⁱⁱⁱ National Low Income Housing Coalition (2026). The Gap: Rhode Island. <https://nlihc.org/gap/state/ri>

^{iv} 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>

^v 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-/>

^{vi} National Network to End Domestic Violence (n.d.). About financial abuse. <https://nnedv.org/content/about-financial-abuse/>