



RE: Testimony in support of S2237—Rhode Island Food Bank Appropriation

Dear Chair DiPalma and Members of the Committee:

Our testimony today is submitted to **express strong support for S2237**. 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.

At its peak last fall, more than 102,000 Rhode Islanders turned to the Rhode Island Community Food Bank's network during the federal shutdown alone. With the cost of living high and federal policy still uncertain, state funding is critical to keeping food on the table for families across our state.

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.”ⁱ This burden means less money is available for food, healthcare, transportation, and other necessities that are essential for survivors striving to rebuild their lives.

Cost burden is especially high among low-income households.ⁱⁱ 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.^{iii,iv,v} When costs of basic needs are high relative to income, survivors may be forced to choose between these essential needs such as heat, electricity, food, and healthcare. This pressure undermines their safety and independence and can lead to lack of stable and nutritious food, housing loss, debt, or reliance on unsafe living situations.

Survivors need policies that recognize the economic dimensions of safety, not just the immediate physical protections. S2237 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 2237 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.

ⁱ 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/>

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

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} 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/>

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