



RE: Testimony in support of Senate Bill S2248 – Duties of Utilities and Carriers

Dear Chair DiPalma and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to write in strong support of **Senate Bill 2248** which seeks to create an income-sensitive, tiered subsidy program for home energy utility costs designed to help make utility bills more affordable for eligible low-income households. This type of support reduces the financial burden of utilities for low-income households, including survivors of domestic violence, which will help to reduce the risk of utility disconnection, stabilize housing, and promote long-term economic independence.

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.

Access to affordable utilities is a critical component of housing stability. 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. Domestic violence affects a significant portion of our community and has long-term financial consequences for survivors.

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.ⁱⁱⁱ Financial abuse is present in almost all abusive relationships, and it often creates barriers that make it difficult for survivors to achieve economic independence and stable housing.^{iv,v} Survivors frequently face damaged credit, limited employment history, and deliberate financial sabotage by abusers which can restrict their access to safe, affordable housing after leaving an abusive relationship.

When utility and housing costs are high relative to income, survivors may be forced to choose between essential needs such as heat, electricity, food, and healthcare. This pressure undermines their safety and independence and can lead to 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. S2248 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 2248 to help ensure survivors of domestic violence 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/>