



RE: Testimony in support of The Rhode Island Works Program, S2828

Dear Chair DiPalma and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support of Senate Bill 2828** which seeks to strengthen our state's cash assistance program to vulnerable families. We are writing to advocate for this critical policy as a tool not only to reduce child poverty but also to strengthen family safety and support for survivors of domestic and family violence.

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.

Survivors, who disproportionately come from low-income backgrounds, often also face damaged credit, limited savings, and urgent financial needs due to economic abuse while trying to secure safety.^{i,ii,iii} **As a number of our clients benefit from RI Works assistance, we know that it is not just helpful but essential, providing a vital lifeline that allows them and their children to rebuild their lives with stability and dignity.** Ensuring continued access to these resources is crucial for breaking the cycle of violence and supporting survivors on their path to long-term independence.

Senate Bill 2828 addresses structural barriers that currently undermine family stability. By removing unnecessary penalties on families who receive child support and those living in subsidized housing, the bill ensures that assistance works as intended — to stabilize families, not punish them for modest gains. The bill also restores access to life-saving assistance for lawful permanent residents, many of whom are working families contributing to our communities but who face significant hardship during times of crisis.

Cash assistance is one of the most effective tools available to prevent crises before they escalate. Stable income reduces stress, decreases the likelihood of violence, improves housing stability, and supports children's well-being.^{iv} When families have the resources to meet basic needs, they are better positioned to achieve long-term self-sufficiency. **By modernizing RI Works and removing punitive barriers, the General Assembly can help ensure that families facing hardship have a meaningful pathway to stability and independence. With this in mind, we respectfully urge passage of Senate Bill 2828.**

ⁱ 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>

ⁱⁱ 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>

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>