

Chairman Louis DiPalma
Senate Finance Committee
RI State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony in support of S2848

Dear Chairman DiPalma and members of the committee,

I write today to reiterate my strong support for Senator Murray's bill, S2848 that seeks to provide Sojourner House with a \$500,000 allocation, and to provide an urgent update from the field.

I am the Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HoH) program manager at Sojourner House. My work is dedicated to enhancing access for people with disabilities, specifically those who are D/HoH. We know that deaf individuals are twice as likely to experience victimization in their lifetime. This is not just policy for me; it is mission driven. I am Hard of Hearing, a mother of two deaf girls, and a child survivor of domestic violence. My mother and I received crucial, trauma-informed support, legal assistance, counseling, safety planning, and most importantly, housing, which allowed us to leave and rebuild our lives. Without victim services, I would have never had the opportunity for stability.

That's why I am strongly encouraging you to stand with survivors by supporting this legislation. Victim service programs provide essential, specialized support to individuals navigating deep trauma and danger. Critically, for marginalized communities, including Deaf, hard of hearing, people with disabilities, these services must embed language access and cultural competency to truly be effective.

My work is currently supported by federal funding, and we are now facing a significant and certain gap in that funding. While we have made progress in ensuring accessibility for all survivors, our work is far from finished. A great deal remains to be done before we can honestly say that accessibility has been fully and equitably embedded into our everyday programming statewide.

From my observation, victim service programs continue to be overwhelmed and understaffed. With rising need and the prospect of funding instability, too many survivors risk being turned away when they need help the most. If we fail to invest in consistent funding for organizations dedicated to this work, we will see devastating costs later in lives lost, in long-term trauma, and in rising public expenses across healthcare, housing, and the criminal justice system.

Please do not let these critical services face a funding cliff. Survivors are counting on you, just as my family once counted on the lifeline of victim services.

Thank you for your continued leadership and commitment to keeping Rhode Island communities safe and supported.

Please pass S2848 this year. Thank you for your time and review of this testimony. Please contact me at aschultz@sojournerri.org if you have any questions about the work I'm doing or this testimony.

Sincerely,

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