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

Re: Testimony in support of S-2848

Dear Chairman DiPalma and members of the committee:

As the Chair of the Board of Sojourner House, I write in strong support of S-2848 which would provide funds to support the work of Sojourner House as it faces unprecedented federal targeting and funding reductions.

The mission of Sojourner House is to promote healthy relationships by providing culturally sensitive support, advocacy, housing, and education for victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking; **and to effect systems change**. Effecting systems changes means fewer victims needing services.

Sojourner House is the largest victim services agency in Rhode Island. It is also one of the very few domestic violence agencies in the country that is developing and managing affordable housing for victims. In 2024, Sojourner provided **emergency shelter** to 130 victims of abuse over 11,000 bed nights, along with transitional housing, rapid re-housing and/or permanent supportive housing for 591 survivors for a total of 138,844 bed nights. These were among the over 5,000 victims from 34 RI cities and towns that Sojourner helped last year.

Many of us don't think that human trafficking is a major issue in Rhode Island, but I was shocked to learn that Sojourner assisted 217 victims of trafficking in 2025 and recently worked with local, state and federal public safety agencies as they raided a major trafficking enterprise on North Main Street in Providence in the shadow of Miriam Hospital. Sojourner House is also now a Regional Access Point for victims of domestic violence across the state.

Like many non-profit agencies, Sojourner House is facing significant challenges to the federal funding that is critical to its mission. Because many of the individuals we serve

identify with the LGBTQ community and/or may be without proper immigration documentation, Sojourner House and its activities may be specifically targeted.

Therefore, whereas in prior years, state funding would have been a supplement to federal funds, now it is essential to protect some of Rhode Island's most vulnerable individuals, especially children.

Five years ago, recognizing the need for affordable housing, Sojourner House began developing housing and now owns, leases, or supports leases for over 200 units statewide, providing permanent supportive housing to victims in addition to emergency shelter and rapid re-housing programs. A safe home is the most effective way to help families transition from violence to stability. Sojourner House is the only organization in Rhode Island creating affordable housing for victims. Therefore, funding for Sojourner will not just support victims and survivors of domestic violence, it will also help address the state's overall need for housing funds.

Please support S-2848, which would provide a \$500,000 allocation for Sojourner House to continue its vital programs at a time when its programs are under direct attack at the federal level and we urgently need more affordable homes.

Very truly yours,

Richard Godfrey