

Chair Melissa A. Murray
Senate Health and Human
Services Committee
Rhode Island State House

March 3, 2026



RE: Testimony in support of BILL S2256 – Relating to Human Services, Medical Assistance

Sojourner House is in strong support of Senate bill 2256 which aligns with our commitment of supporting survivors of domestic and sexual violence (DV/SV). As a prominent non-profit organization in Rhode Island serving over 5,000 clients in almost every city and town across our state, we are well positioned to speak to the needs of survivors of domestic and sexual violence and the importance of S2256 in attempting to address some of those needs.

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.

S2256 would allow licensed independent clinical social workers to be reimbursed for their services through Medicaid. Passing this bill would remove barriers for these professionals in providing essential services to low-income Rhode Islanders in need of mental health support which is of particular importance among our RI neighbors impacted by domestic and sexual violence. Domestic violence is most common among women, lower-income households, and in lower-income neighborhoods where economic resources are already scarce.^{i,ii,iii,iv,v,vi} Further, nearly all who report experiences of domestic violence (94-99%) have been economically victimized.^{vii,viii} As a result, these women often have a harder time gaining economic independence; instead, they are left choosing between staying in an abusive relationship or leaving with little to no resources to sustain themselves and their children.^{vii,viii,ix}

Coupled with the constraints of leaving experiences of violence and abuse, survivors of domestic and sexual violence and human trafficking face significant negative mental health repercussions including post-traumatic stress disorder and depression affecting between 54-75% of survivors.^x The economic background and exploitation of those who experience DV/SV makes it difficult for those fleeing to secure the resources needed to mentally heal. **Passing bill S2256 would help expand access to critical mental health resources among some of the most vulnerable Rhode Islanders.**

On behalf of Sojourner House, one of Rhode Island's leading domestic and sexual violence non-profit

organizations, we respectfully urge you to support House bill S2256 to help increase mental health support among our Rhode Island communities and pathways forward for survivors in our state.

ⁱ Ahmadabadi, Z., Najman, J. M., Williams, G. M., & Clavarino, A. M. (2020). Income, gender, and forms of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 35(23-24), 5500-5525. <https://doi.org/10.1177/088626051771954160.3.1.59>

ⁱⁱ 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>

ⁱⁱⁱ Community Housing Network (2023, October 30). Domestic violence survivors face a silent crisis due to lack of affordable housing. [https://communityhousingnetwork.org/domestic-violence-survivors-face-a-silent-crisis-due-to-lack-of-affordable-housing/#:~:text=For%20every%20100%20extremely%20low%2Dincome%20renter%20households%2C,the%20National%20Low%20Income%20Housing%20Coalition%20\(NLIHC\)](https://communityhousingnetwork.org/domestic-violence-survivors-face-a-silent-crisis-due-to-lack-of-affordable-housing/#:~:text=For%20every%20100%20extremely%20low%2Dincome%20renter%20households%2C,the%20National%20Low%20Income%20Housing%20Coalition%20(NLIHC))

^{iv} Huecker, M. R., King, K. C., Jordan, G. A., & Smock, W. (2023). Domestic violence. *Statpearls*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK499891/>

^v Iyengar, R. & Sabik, L. (2009). The dangerous shortage of domestic violence services. *Health Affairs*, 28(6), w1052-w1065. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.28.6.w1052>

^{vi} World Health Organization (2024, March 25). Violence against women. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

^{vii} 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>

^{viii} 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>

^{ix} Bullock, H. E., Reppond, H. A., Truong, S. V., & Singh, M. R. (2020). An intersectional analysis of the feminization of homelessness and mothers' housing precarity. *Journal of Social Issues*, 76, 835-858. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12406>

^x Nathanson, A. M., Shorey, R. C., Tirone, V., Rhatigan, D. L. (2012). The prevalence of mental health disorder in a community sample of female victims of intimate partner violence. *Partner Abuse*, 3(1), 59-75. <https://doi.org/10.1891/1946-6560.3.1.59>