

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

April 9, 2026



**RE: Testimony in support of Senate Bill 2853, Healthcare Facilities and Sexual Assault**

Dear Chair Murray and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Sojourner House, we write in strong **support of S2853** which would ensure that any healthcare facility that provides emergency care to patients is required to provide accurate information about emergency contraception, how to access it, and access to it if requested for victims of sexual assault.

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.

Survivors of sexual assault often come into contact with the healthcare system at one of the most traumatic moments of their lives where those facilities can either help or hinder a survivor seeking support.<sup>i</sup> The care they receive in that moment can have lasting consequences for their physical health, emotional well-being, and sense of autonomy.

Senate Bill 2853 ensures that survivors are provided with timely, accurate information about emergency contraception and, critically, that they are able to access it immediately if they choose. This is an essential component of comprehensive, trauma-informed care.<sup>ii</sup> From our work with survivors, we know barriers to accessing emergency contraception are real and consequential. Lack of information about options, limited ability to return to follow-up appointments, transportation barriers, and/or control or surveillance by an abusive partner or trafficker are especially prevalent among the most vulnerable survivors.<sup>iii</sup>

**Emergency contraception is time-sensitive and information about it is imperative to ensure survivors have full autonomy over their own decisions following sexual assault.**<sup>iv</sup> Even very short delays can eliminate the option for emergency contraception entirely. By ensuring access at the point of care, this bill removes a significant and preventable barrier. **Survivors deserve the ability to make informed decisions about their own bodies in the immediate aftermath of an assault.** Providing information and access respects that autonomy without imposing any requirement on the survivor. Survivors of human trafficking and intimate partner violence may be at heightened risk of reproductive coercion.<sup>v,vi</sup> Ensuring access to emergency contraception can be a critical intervention point for individuals who may otherwise have very limited control over their reproductive health.

Importantly, S2853 builds on existing obligations for emergency care and clarifies that this aspect of care must be consistently available. **It promotes a standard of care that is compassionate, equitable, and responsive to the realities survivors face and we therefore, respectfully urge the Committee to support Senate Bill 2853.**

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<sup>i</sup> Wadsworth, P., Krache, E., & Searing, K. (2019). Health care seeking and engagement after sexual assault. *The Journal for Nurse Practitioners*, 15(10), 801-805. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nurpra.2019.07.022>

<sup>ii</sup> Reeves, E. (2015). A synthesis of the literature on trauma-informed care. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 36(9), 698-709. <https://doi.org/10.3109/01612840.2015.1025319>

<sup>iii</sup> Bach, M. H., Hansen, N. B., Ahrens, C., Nielsen, C. R., Walshe, C., & Hansen, M. (2021). Underserved survivors of sexual assault: A systematic scoping review. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2021.895516>

<sup>iv</sup> Nation Women's Law Center (9 December, 2022). Providing emergency contraception to sexual assault survivors. <https://nwlrc.org/resource/providing-emergency-contraception-to-sexual-assault-survivors/>

<sup>v</sup> Lambert, C. A. (2 January, 2025). Reproductive coercion rising for domestic violence survivors. *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mind-games/202501/reproductive-coercion-rising-for-domestic-violence-survivors>

<sup>vi</sup> Brotherton, S. & Manirakiza, J. (2019). Understanding sex trafficking through the lens of coercion: A closer look at exploitation, threats, and betrayal (pp. 125-142). In M. C. Burke (Ed.) *Working with the human trafficking survivor: what counselors, psychologists, social workers and medical professionals need to know*. Routledge.