RI COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Member Agencies

Blackstone Valley
Advocacy Center

Domestic Violence
Resource Center of
South County

Elizabeth Buffum
Chace Center

Women's Resource Center

Task Force

Sisters Overcoming
Abusive Relationships

Affiliate Members

Center for Southeast Asians

Crossroads Rhode Island

Family Service of Rhode Island

McAuley Ministries –
McAuley Village

Progreso Latino

YWCA Rhode Island

To: Senator Matthew LaMountain, Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee
        Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Lucy Rios, Executive Director
        RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Date: March 12, 2026

Re: **Support for S-2489, Coercive Control in Civil RO's, Request for Amendments**

On behalf of our network of member agencies and SOAR (Sisters Overcoming Abusive Relationships), our taskforce of survivors, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence appreciates this opportunity to express **our support for Senate Bill 2489, adding "coercive control" acts and patterns of conduct to our civil domestic abuse restraining order statute.** "Coercive control of another" is defined in the bill as "a pattern of behavior that in purpose or effect unreasonably interferes with a person's free will and personal liberty." Coercive control is a tactic that abusers use to dominate their intimate partners. This common form of abuse is a pattern of behavior intended to threaten, intimidate, harass, isolate, control, coerce or compel compliance of a family or household member, causing the family/household member or partner to fear physical harm or have a reduced sense of physical safety or autonomy. Coercive control tactics can include isolation from family/friends; threatening to harm a child, family member or pet; damaging property; tech-abuse; tracking victim's location; threatening to release sensitive or sexual images or information, and similar insidious conduct.

In passing this bill, Rhode Island would join our neighboring states Massachusetts, Connecticut and Vermont, as well as California, Colorado, Hawaii, Washington state and New Jersey, which have passed laws defining coercive control as a form of domestic abuse in their civil laws. **The long-lasting and devastating harm caused by coercive control should be recognized in our civil restraining order statutes, both Family Court and District Court. Non-physical abuse and repeated patterns of psychological, emotional and financial abuse are typically a precursor to escalating abusive and violent acts, including sexual and physical assault or homicide.**

Importantly, this legislation does not criminalize patterns of coercive control. However, if an abusive party has an active protective order against them, and commits additional acts of coercive control, this could be considered a criminal misdemeanor violation of the order.

To make this bill the best possible, based on survivor advocacy best practices and key provisions from civil coercive control laws in other states, including Massachusetts, we respectfully request that the following be added to the bill's list of coercive control conduct: 1.) Intentionally damaging property belonging to the family or household member; 2.) Abusive litigation, already recognized in RI law and defined in the MA statute as "using repeated court actions found by a court not to be warranted by existing law or good faith argument"; 3.) Reproductive control and/or coercion; and 4.) Threatening to harm a child or relative, in addition to threats to pets and animals. This remedy should also apply in both Family and District court civil restraining orders, not limited to Family Court RO's, as currently drafted.

If the law fails to recognize the power imbalance that allows abusers to intimidate and control victims continually; letting abusers freely manipulate and silence survivors' voices, then cycles of violence and abuse will only continue. We urge you to amend this bill and then pass it.