



April 11, 2024

Chair Marvin Abney
House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Support for House Bill No. 7851 (Rhode Island Baby Bond Trust)

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

I am writing as the Executive Director of Sojourner House in strong support of General Treasurer James Diossa's Baby Bonds bill, House Bill No. 7851, which seeks to increase the educational and financial prospects of young adults in our state.

At Sojourner House, we support and empower survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking as they work to gain economic stability, heal, and rebuild their lives. Since our founding in 1976, we've helped more than 60,000 Rhode Islanders access safe shelter, trauma-informed care, and a pathway to permanent stable housing.

In October 2022, Sojourner House launched a new program called Transitional Age Youth (TAY), which provides victims of abuse between the ages of 18 and 24 with crisis housing and rapid rehousing. We launched this program because we realized that our community had a severe lack of supportive services available for low-income young people, and that rates of interpersonal violence and homelessness within this demographic appeared to be rising.

Within the last nine months, Sojourner House has had more than 516 people attend our housing clinics looking for guidance and aid. Of those people, a shocking 15% were between the ages of 18 and 24. Most of the time, these young people seek us out because they lack the resources and financial freedom needed to break free from abuse on their own.

386 Smith Street | Providence, RI 02908

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Committed to Ending
Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault
and Human Trafficking

If this bill were passed, it would enable young people in vulnerable situations such as these to use the funds that would be invested under this program to cover expenses such as home or vehicle payments and to pay for educational and career opportunities that might otherwise not be accessible to them. These reserve funds would act as a powerful form of violence prevention, by empowering lower-income adolescents and providing them with a level of financial stability they otherwise lack. With these funds, they would be able to make decisions that benefit their health and safety.

Sojourner House urges this committee to support this bill due to the potential it has to make a real difference in the lives of our most vulnerable community members. Thank you for your time and review of this testimony, and for your continued efforts to support victims of violent crime in Rhode Island. If you have any questions about our work or this testimony, please contact me at vvolz@sojournerri.org, or by phone at (401) 861-6191.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Volz
Executive Director

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