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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: Representative Robert Craven, Chair of the House Judiciary Committee
Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee

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

Date: April 24, 2024

Re: Support for House Bill 7567

On behalf of our network of member agencies and SOAR, our taskforce of survivors, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) appreciates this opportunity to express our **support for House Bill 7567**. This legislation will enhance safety for survivors, and their children, who have a protective order in place that has been violated by the abusive party.

This bill focuses on the prosecution of domestic violence protective order violations, including domestic violence or sexual assault restraining orders issued in District Court, Family Court, or the violation of criminal No-Contact Orders issued after arrest. Such violations are normally prosecuted by local city and town solicitors, depending on the jurisdiction of the violation. Some cities and towns work with law enforcement officer prosecutors in certain matters as well. This legislation would require that these city and town prosecutors self-certify that they are an attorney who has successfully completed a specialized domestic violence prosecution training course, with an updated training every four (4) years thereafter, aligned with national best practices and eligible for continuing legal education (CLE) credit(s) as approved by the Rhode Island Bar Association.

We support the important proposals included in this legislation. Survivors that we interact with and advocate for have long voiced the need for ongoing specialized domestic violence-focused training and trauma-informed services training for all Rhode Island prosecutors and other attorneys, to enhance communication with survivors of intimate partner violence and ensure prosecutors doing this work are most effective and impactful in the work to protect and support victims. An informed and DV-specific prosecution strategy and empathetic survivor-centered communication between the prosecuting attorney and the victim can be life-saving advocacy for survivors in our state.

Nearly 1 in 2 women in Rhode Island report experiencing some form of intimate partner violence at some point in their lives.¹ The purpose of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) is to eliminate domestic violence in Rhode Island. Our mission is to support and enhance the work of our member agencies and to provide leadership on the issue of domestic violence. The member agencies of the RICADV provide essential services to thousands of survivors of domestic violence and their children every year in Rhode Island. These services help survivors build resilience and find safety after experiencing abuse.

Leaving an abusive relationship and seeking a restraining order and court intervention can be a very dangerous time for a victim of intimate partner violence. Even if a survivor is able to leave an abusive situation successfully, this does not put an end to abuse they can

¹ Smith SG, Khatiwada S, Richardson L, Basile KC, Friar NW, Chen J, Zhang Kudon H, & Leemis RW. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 State Report. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 2023

experience. Perpetrators of domestic violence will often escalate their tactics of abuse as they start to lose control over the victim, including threats, stalking behaviors, and violating active protective orders. The risk of intimate partner homicide against women increases significantly when they separate from their abusive partner. This is true regardless of whether the victim leaves the home or asks the abusive partner to leave.

The societal costs associated with intimate partner violence are staggering. According to the CDC, the lifetime per-victim cost is \$103,767 for women and \$23,414 for men. The lifetime economic cost to the U.S. population is \$3.6 trillion.² **During calendar year 2023, Rhode Island's statewide network of domestic violence shelters and advocacy programs served over 9,300 survivors of abuse and over 12,000 Helpline and agency hotline calls were answered. Annually in Rhode Island, nearly 3,000 victims of domestic violence are assisted by a court advocate in obtaining a protective order in Family and District Court.**

While domestic violence court advocates are available in every Rhode Island courthouse to support victims as they navigate through their journey, their resources are limited and this legislation could create another level of support and trauma-informed safety for R.I. survivors.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation and your support to prevent domestic violence and enhance safety for survivors and their children in Rhode Island.

² Intimate partner violence: Consequences. *U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html>