

Phyillicia LaBoard
H.222 – Draft Testimony
12 May 2025

Chairperson and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Phyillicia LaBoard, and I come before you not only as a survivor of domestic violence but also as a committed advocate for stronger, more inclusive protections for all survivors.

I support the core intent of House Bill 222, which seeks to authorize courts to require completion of domestic violence accountability programs as a condition for granting final relief from abuse orders. This is a meaningful step toward fostering accountability and preventing future harm.

However, I must urge the Committee to critically re-examine aspects of this bill that, in its current form, risk perpetuating the very exclusions that left me vulnerable—exclusions that continue to affect many today.

As a melanated woman living in Vermont, and as someone who was once married to a white partner, my experience with domestic violence was compounded by systemic inequities and racialized dynamics that the law failed to recognize or address. My abuser not only inflicted harm but also weaponized societal biases and institutional blind spots to further isolate and endanger me.

One of the most glaring deficiencies in my case was the absence of a permanent order of protection with a clearly defined and extended timeframe. This left me in a prolonged state of fear and uncertainty. Even more troubling is the bill's limited scope in addressing abuse facilitated through digital technology—a form of harm that continues to affect me to this day. The protections I needed then, and that many still need now, were simply not there.

While H.222 does include a definition of “course of conduct” that touches on electronic surveillance, it falls short of capturing the full spectrum of

digital abuse. I strongly recommend that the bill be amended to explicitly include language such as: *“including but not limited to social media interactions, text messaging, email communication, and any other form of digital communication or platform.”* This clarity is essential to ensure that survivors are protected from the evolving and often insidious nature of online abuse.

Additionally, the bill must address the tactic of abuse by proxy—when abusers enlist or coerce others to harass, surveil, or intimidate on their behalf. This was a reality in my own experience, and it remains a dangerous loophole in current protections.

Another critical gap lies in the bill’s silence on abuse that occurs within professional contexts, particularly when the abuser is employed by state or federal agencies. Survivors should not be left without recourse simply because their abuser holds a position of institutional power. The law must acknowledge and address the potential for abuse of authority in these settings.

In conclusion, while I commend the intent behind House Bill 222, I urge the Committee to adopt a more comprehensive and intersectional approach—one that reflects the lived realities of all survivors. This includes expanding protections against digital abuse, addressing abuse by proxy, and ensuring safeguards in professional and institutional contexts. My experience is not unique, and it is my hope that no one else will have to navigate the same gaps in protection that I did.

Thank you for your time, your commitment to justice, and your willingness to listen. I am available to answer any questions you may have.