



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

SCOTT M. STRINGER
BOROUGH PRESIDENT

**Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer
Testimony Before the New York City Council
Joint Committee on Women's Issues and Public Housing
June 11, 2009**

Thank you Chairwoman Mealy and Chairwoman Mendez for convening this important oversight hearing on the obstacles facing domestic violence victims who seek access to the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) system.

In New York City domestic violence remains a serious problem. Last year, over 4,000 women were treated in emergency rooms for domestic violence related injuries and 22 women died as a result of domestic violence. We know from experience that one of the most reliable ways to protect families and victims of domestic violence is to rapidly transition them from their previous living situation into safe, affordable housing.

On May 8th, I sent a letter to Deputy Mayor Gibbs and Department of Homeless Services Commissioner Gibbs, urging the City to allocate \$7.4 million in federal stimulus money to the Human Resources Administration for low income victims of domestic violence. In that same letter, I additionally called for a swift reform of the processing of applications by domestic violence survivors for NYCHA housing. Although the primary request did not come to fruition, the latter request can and should still be realized.

With a massive development portfolio spread across the five boroughs, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is in a unique position to discretely provide safe and affordable housing for domestic violence victims. Yet, far too often my office receives reports from victims and advocates that the criteria employed by NYCHA for housing domestic violence victims and their families are too stringent and the processing period for applications submitted by domestic violence survivors is too long.

For example, in many cases, NYCHA requires domestic violence survivors to submit two different police reports in order to obtain shelter in a public housing building. The result is that domestic violence victims and their families who lack safe alternate housing are sent back to the homes of their intimate abusers for a second, and potentially fatal, round of maltreatment before their situation is deemed to be serious enough to qualify for NYCHA housing. I call on the Housing Authority to correct this fault in the application process immediately so that documented domestic violence survivors are not exposed to subsequent rounds of abuse.

On top of this much needed reform of the application criteria, NYCHA should take steps toward increasing staff resources to expedite the processing of applications by domestic violence survivors for Housing Authority units. The economic and human costs to victims left in limbo that are directly associated with delays in the processing of DV victim applications far outweigh

the staffing costs necessary to move this process at a more reasonable speed. It is unacceptable for victims of domestic violence living in unsafe conditions to, in some cases, wait a year or longer for their application to be processed by the Housing Authority.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this issue. I look forward to working together with the City Council and with New York City's distinguished group of domestic violence advocates to improve access to public housing for DV victims and their families.

Testimony by The Legal Aid Society and Legal Services for New York City before the Sub
Committee on Public Housing and the Committee on Women's Issues on Access to Public
Housing for Victims of Domestic Violence

June 11, 2009

Interest and Expertise of the Legal Aid Society and Legal Services for New York City

The Legal Aid Society is one of the oldest and largest providers of legal assistance to the poor in the United States. The Society's Civil Practice operates 14 neighborhood offices and city-wide units serving residents of all five boroughs of New York City, providing comprehensive legal assistance in housing, public assistance, and other civil areas of primary concern to the poor. The Society is counsel on numerous class-action cases concerning the rights of public housing residents and is counsel to the New York City Public Housing Resident Alliance. We work closely with the Community Service Society and Public Housing Residents of the Lower East Side on public housing issues. The New York City Public Housing Resident Alliance seeks to inform and network with residents, so that they can have a strong and effective voice and secure greater accountability in local, state and federal policy decisions that affect public housing in New York City.

Legal Services for New York City (LSNY) is the largest provider of free civil legal services in the country. The nineteen neighborhood offices of LSNY throughout the City represent thousands of low-income tenants annually in disputes involving tenants' rights to remain in their homes.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on Public Housing and the Committee on Women's Issues. We have major concerns regarding the Housing Authority's treatment of victims of domestic violence.

The Problem

NYCHA has a priority for domestic violence victims for both Section 8 and public housing. However the priority is very narrow. The priority is: "Applicants who have suffered serious or repeated abuse from a family member or a person with whom they had, or continue to have, an intimate relationship, and as a result of the abuse the victim suffered actual physical injury or the threat of injury, and the victim: (a) will continue to suffer abuse if he or she continues to live in the current residence, or (b) has left the residence due to the abuse and is not living in standard permanent replacement housing." In order to receive this priority, the applicant must produce three documents: (1) a document demonstrating that the applicant was physically assaulted or threatened, (2) another document demonstrating that the applicant was physically assaulted or threatened *on another occasion*, (3) an advocacy letter. (see attached). The only exception to showing that the applicant has been assaulted more than once is if the abuser committed a serious felony, as defined by NYCHA. This basically ensures that many domestic violence victims, including those in domestic violence shelters will not be eligible for the priority and will not receive either public housing or Section 8. Very few applicants are admitted under this priority despite the number of domestic violence victims in domestic violence shelters.

Likewise, the Housing Authority has the same requirements for someone seeking a transfer for domestic violence reasons. In addition, the Housing Authority requires transfer applicants to have an exclusionary order of protection if the batterer lives in the apartment. Exclusionary orders of protection are very difficult to get.

The Housing Authority's policies ensure that many victims of domestic violence will not be able to obtain public housing or Section 8. In addition, the Housing Authority's transfer policies ensure that many victims of domestic violence will be forced to remain with their batterer -- and risk eviction because of the actions of their batterer against them.

The Solution

The Housing Authority should not require that a victim of domestic violence suffer twice before being eligible for a transfer or a priority for public housing and Section 8. In addition, The Housing Authority should give a domestic violence priority to people in the domestic violence shelter system and domestic violence victims in the shelter system. In addition, the Housing Authority should:

- i. Accept shelter or NOVA certifications as sufficient proof of Domestic Violence
- ii. Accept other forms of medical documentation (emergency rooms records, letters from physicians)
- iii. Accept Domestic Incident Reports for harassment and other Domestic Violence violations
- iv. Accept one family offense petition that cites multiple incidents of Domestic Violence
- v. Using VAWA criteria (as other PHAs in the country do) including self-certification.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the Committee on Women's Issues and the Subcommittee on Public Housing.

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FOR THE RECORD

CONNECT's Testimony for the Women's Issues Committee

And the Subcommittee on Public Housing

Presented by Fiona Oliphant, Esq.

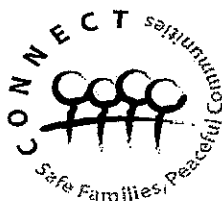
June 11, 2009

Good morning. My name is Fiona Oliphant and I am the Director of CONNECT's Legal Advocacy Program (LAP). Thank you for the opportunity to share the most pressing concern that most of our clients have, the lack of safe and affordable housing options to facilitate their transition to safer lives. I come before you today not as a housing policy expert, but as a domestic violence attorney who is exceedingly frustrated by the fact that many of our legal efforts and achievements are consistently undermined by the lack of affordable housing. I come before you today to give a voice to CONNECT's many clients who are forced to make heart-wrenching decisions about their futures and their families' safety. First, I will tell you about CONNECT and what we do and then I will turn to the dire reality that our clients face on a daily basis.



CONNECT is a New York City nonprofit organization that has been developing innovative responses to the problem of domestic violence for 15 years. It has a successful track record of creating and implementing unique, multifaceted domestic violence prevention and early intervention programs. CONNECT is dedicated to ending family and gender violence and to the creation of safe families and peaceful communities through a combination of prevention, transformative education and early intervention programs. It works within families and communities, particularly immigrant families and communities, to transform the beliefs and behaviors that fuel patterns of abuse. CONECT has a well documented history of providing substantive and transformative domestic violence education to preventive workers, counselors, attorneys and other service providers.

To do its work, CONNECT has developed partnerships with over 200 community organizations including public libraries, small businesses, centers of worship, and community health centers to create and support innovative ways of addressing domestic violence in under-served, high risk communities. Additionally, it has developed programs which focus on the issues that survivors of abuse often confront. Through the combined efforts of its Community Empowerment Program, Family Violence Prevention Program, CONNECT Training Institute, CONNECT Faith and Legal Advocacy Program (LAP), clients have access to community-based organizations trained to counsel and assist survivors, a network of agencies working to ensure that children are kept in the care of the survivor moms, a network of faith-



based allies that work hand-in-hand to provide technical assistance and support tailored to the needs of the particular cultural and religious needs of the particular ministry or faith community, and professional legal advocates who help survivors navigate the legal hurdles they may need to negotiate.

CONNECT's Legal Advocacy Program (LAP) was created to assist individual victims of domestic abuse with the law enforcement and judicial response to incidents of violence. It is comprised of the Legal Advocacy Helpline, Coordinated Action Against Violence (CAAV) and a direct immigration representation project. The Legal Advocacy Helpline is attorney supervised and helps survivors of domestic violence navigate the New York City legal system and advocates on their behalf with city and/or state agencies including police precincts, district attorney's offices, and the Administration for Children's Services. Coordinated Action Against Violence (CAAV) is an early intervention domestic violence program in Harlem. The goal of CAAV is to ensure the safety of people who have filed domestic incident reports with the police and empower them with accurate legal information and community resources to make safer and more informed decisions. Since 2006 LAP has also provided direct immigration representation including VAWA self-petitions, Battered Spouse Waivers and U-visas. We work with an average of almost two thousand domestic violence survivors annually.



Although we focus on survivors' legal issues, it is evident that safe and affordable housing is one of their largest obstacles to achieving stable, nonviolent lives. We would be blind not to see and acknowledge the impact that the lack of housing has on our clients and their ability to effectively navigate legal systems. Imagine having to focus on a family court case or having to secure the dozens of documents necessary to submit a VAWA self-petition when you don't know where you and your family are going to sleep that night. CONNECT often finds that it cannot address our clients' legal issues without simultaneously grappling with their housing concerns.

The overwhelming majority of CONNECT's clients have some type housing concern. They range from the pros and cons of accessing the shelter system, to post-shelter transitional housing, to affordable permanent housing. We cannot minimize our clients' concerns. After all, we all know the reality that survivors face today. According to the VERA Institute of Justice, 21% of those in the general homeless system reported a history of domestic violence and 80% of that population reported that domestic violence significantly contributed to their homelessness. Additionally, the two thousand plus shelter beds throughout New York City are only available to survivors for an average of four and a half months. However, locating affordable housing while addressing the multiple pressures that survivors must face like obtaining an order of protection, petitioning for custody, seeking trauma counseling, applying for public benefits, attempting to adjust you immigration status, protecting



your children and creating the space for healing all take far longer than the four and a half months allotted. Furthermore, after shelter only 18% of the shelter residents move on to permanent housing. This reality is even more bleak for immigrant survivors who are not eligible for any housing subsidies unless they have self-petitioned to adjust their status.

Given that reality, many of CONNECT's clients have cause to pause before deciding to leave the home known to or shared with their batterers. Should they risk homelessness for themselves and their children? Should they start the shelter process only to be forced to return to their batterers because there is no affordable or subsidized permanent housing for them to move into? Or should they simply try to stay safe in place and keep a roof over their families' heads?

I will leave you with the story of Maria. Maria is the survivor of years of horrific abuse at the hands of her batterer. Maria is an undocumented, indigenous woman from South America. She can neither read nor write in Spanish or English. She has a limited income. Maria and her batterer have a "tween" daughter who has internalized a great deal of her father's antipathy for her mother. Maria has won permanent custody, but her batterer repeatedly drags her to court to try to reverse the custody order. Maria has finally found "permanent" housing for herself and her daughter. They share an apartment in Queens with three other families. Recently, her batterer has taken her back to court stating that their living conditions, including

multiple unrelated men, endanger their daughter. Now Maria has been told that she must find alternative housing or risk losing custody of her daughter. Maria is distraught because she knows that her chances of finding such alternative housing are slim. She lives with the fear that she will lose the daughter she loves so much and has fought so hard to protect.

Although I cannot leave you with a solution to creating sufficient affordable/ public housing, I leave you with a charge to please think of Maria while you debate the availability of public housing available to domestic violence survivors in New York City. Think of the many ripple effects that the lack of such housing has on these survivors' lives and their legal cases. Thank you.



Testimony of
Safe Horizon, Inc.

“Access to Public Housing for Victims of Domestic Violence”

Women’s Issues Committee
Hon. Darlene Mealy, Chair

Public Housing Committee
Hon. Rosie Mendez, Chair

New York City Council

June 11, 2009

Introduction

Thank you, Chairwoman Mealy and Chairwoman Mendez, for the opportunity to testify before you today on access to public housing for domestic violence victims. My name is Nathaniel Fields, and I am the Senior Vice President for Domestic Violence Shelter and Hotlines for Safe Horizon, the nation's leading victim assistance organization and New York City's largest provider of services to victims of crime and abuse, their families and communities. Safe Horizon creates hope and opportunities for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers each year whose lives are touched by violence. We also work closely with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), which gives us added insight into the application process for publicly funded housing. We appreciate that NYCHA has a limited supply of available apartments and Section 8 vouchers, and we are thankful that they recognize victims of domestic violence as a priority for this limited stock of housing. We also appreciate the many changes that NYCHA has made to the application process over the past five years, including changes to the documents they require supporting victimization.

Safe Horizon works closely with the Housing Authority in several areas. To assist housing authority residents who may be experiencing domestic violence, Safe Horizon operates the **Domestic Violence Intervention, Education and Prevention Program (DVIEP)** located in seven Police Service Areas (PSA 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9). This program partners Safe Horizon case managers with NYPD Housing Bureau's domestic violence police officers to conduct outreach and assist victims of domestic violence who reside in NYCHA developments. These case managers provide assistance and crisis intervention for victims of domestic violence, and educate the community about victims' rights, particularly within the housing and criminal justice

systems. Our staff works side by side with the police in the PSAs to help families receive support and connect to the services they need to make informed decisions and manage their risk.

In addition, Safe Horizon, through the **Emergency Transfer Program (ETP)**, is the designated agency that processes emergency transfer applications for NYCHA residents in danger of continued violence and abuse. In 2008, we assisted 788 NYCHA residents who were victims of domestic violence, child sexual assault and intimidation to apply for an emergency housing transfer through ETP. If residents are in need of a transfer, Safe Horizon staff at the PSAs, courts and community programs help them complete the application packet, assist them in obtaining the required documents to support their victimization, and advocate on their behalf with NYCHA for approval of the transfer application. Working with NYCHA, our staff helps move the application through the proper channels to ensure timely re-location and thus decrease the risk of ongoing violence.

Finally, Safe Horizon Criminal Justice, Court and domestic violence shelter staff assist victims of crime and abuse apply for priority status through the NYCHA developments or the Section 8 program. These residents are often the victims of ongoing domestic violence and cannot return to their prior address. Or, they are residing in a violent home until space opens up in a domestic violence shelter. We work closely with victims of domestic violence to: assess their eligibility for priority status; help them fill out the application completely and accurately; aid them in obtaining the required documents supporting their victimization; and write an advocacy letter requesting they be awarded priority status due to the ongoing threat of violence in the home.

We are grateful that the City Council is taking a careful look at the struggles victims of domestic violence face as they try to obtain permanent, affordable housing through NYCHA. The competing pressures of an inadequate stock of public housing and a relatively short length of stay (a maximum of 135 days) in emergency domestic violence shelters adds up to a demand for housing that grossly exceeds supply. The Preliminary Mayor's Management Report from February 2009 shows an occupancy rate of 99.2% for the 178,000 apartments in NYCHA developments, which demonstrates the scarcity of vacant units within the housing authority.

But additional supports are needed for victims of domestic violence to avoid or minimize their time in the expensive shelter system and move to safe permanent housing. For example, one of the documents most often submitted by applicants seeking priority status is a Domestic Incident Report (DIR). But victims who do not wish to involve the criminal justice system in their lives will be excluded from obtaining this key document.

For example, our Domestic Violence Law Project is working with a victim of domestic violence who chose not to enter a domestic violence shelter so as not to disrupt her children's schooling. She has a Family Court order of protection against her husband which he has violated five times. She does not want to involve the police because her husband will likely be deported upon arrest (he is undocumented). If he is deported, her children will be devastated and she will lose the \$700 he pays in child support each month, which is her only source of income. With the order of protection as the only document verifying her abuse, she is not currently eligible to apply for priority status to NYCHA.

This huge gap between supply and demand combined with a stringent application process forces many thousands of domestic violence victims who reach their 135 day maximum stay in DV emergency shelter to enter the Department of Homeless Services shelter system, or even stay with their abuser. For Safe Horizon, it is this very issue – the victim’s safety – that concerns us the most. Our mission requires us to be vigilant about how our clients are faring after experiencing trauma and abuse. Sadly, we fear that lengthy delays in securing permanent, affordable housing may be putting lives in jeopardy.

Obstacles

The obstacles we face in trying to place victims of domestic violence into public housing are not unique. Each day, our staff helps dozens of domestic violence victims gather the required documentation, write advocacy letters on their behalf, and submit them to NYCHA.

Unfortunately, due to the volume of applications that NYCHA receives on a daily basis, the wait for review can be lengthy.. Some victims wait a month or longer to be notified that they have been given priority status and can wait another two to three months for an eligibility interview. If there are any questions or problems with the application, this timeframe will be further extended.

Recommendations

We have a few recommendations for how to enhance the application process which we would like to share to with you and your colleagues today. It is our hope that domestic violence

advocates and NYCHA can work together to make the application process easier for victims of domestic violence.

1. Convene a committee with representatives from NYCHA and the victim advocacy community to review what documentation is currently required and what the obstacles are in obtaining some or all of these documents.
2. Consider the use of alternative documents such as a DV shelter letter to expedite the victim's application process.
3. Create more linkages between NYCHA and the victim advocacy community, primarily by allowing direct communication between advocates and the DV specialists in NYCHA's application unit. This would help keep both parties more fully informed about the application process and how it can best serve victims of domestic violence.
4. Direct ten percent of the federal stimulus dollars for homelessness prevention to specifically assist victims of domestic violence access permanent housing. This funding could be used to improve permanent housing outcomes from shelter, increase the ability of survivors to sustain permanent housing after leaving shelter, and to provide alternatives to shelter for domestic violence survivors in the general population.

Thank you again for inviting us to testify today. Again, we appreciate NYCHA's recognition that victims of domestic violence deserve special priority for scarce public housing resources and we look forward to working with their leadership, as well as the City Council and our colleagues in the victim advocacy community, to help keep New Yorkers safe from violence and abuse. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.

City Council Hearing
Committee on Women's Issues and the Subcommittee on Public Housing
Access to Public Housing for Victims of Domestic Violence
Staten Island Legal Services
June 11, 2009

Good morning members of the Committee on Women's Issues and the Subcommittee on Public Housing. My name is Claire McCue and I am a licensed social worker at Staten Island Legal Services. We appreciate your holding this hearing today and permitting us to speak to you about concerns with NYCHA's system for granting Section 8 priorities for domestic violence survivors. The Section 8 Victim of Domestic Violence Priority Program (VDV) was designed to enable victims without financial resources to escape dangerous and abusive relationships. Unfortunately the program has failed to serve many victims in desperate need of help as the result of its burdensome application process and its failure to process applications promptly.

Staten Island Legal Services (SILS) represents low-income domestic violence victims and a critical part of our assistance involves helping women develop safe plans to escape abusive relationships. Key to that plan is securing shelter, and ultimately permanent housing; without a place to live and the means to support themselves and their children, our clients are often unable to leave their abusers. Over the past year, we have helped approximately 20 women apply for the VDV program. Many of our clients are at least as concerned about obtaining housing as they are about getting orders of protection.

From our recent experience, we have three main concerns with the VDV:

1. **Lengthy delays.** The agency takes far too long to make decisions. Our clients' applications have languished with NYCHA for many months, and in some cases well over a year, while our clients were left in dangerous situations with no other options.

One of our clients actually waited 18 months for NYCHA to approve her application even with our assistance and advocacy throughout the process. Her batterer, a violent man who served time for murder, had found her once and she was desperately afraid that he would find her again. Yet month after month, the agency sat on her application preventing her from relocating. One of our sister offices in Brooklyn filed a law suit in October 2008 on behalf of a client whose application was filed in February 2007, and who, 20 months later, still had not been approved for the VDV. In the end, it took two full years for her to be approved for a Section 8 voucher. Such lengthy delays in processing applications are inexcusable.

Mismanagement of files and improper rejection of applications contributes to these unfortunate delays. In several instances, when we called to inquire about applications that we submitted ourselves, NYCHA could not find the applications; we have had to resend applications multiple times in several cases. In other instances, our clients' applications were erroneously rejected and we had to contact NYCHA to explain that our clients in fact met the eligibility requirements and should not have been rejected.

HUD's Manual #7420.106 § 4.1 governing Section 8 housing states that public housing authorities, such as NYCHA, must assist needy families "fairly and as quickly as possible". NYCHA must establish a transparent system with precise and short time frames for processing applications and ensure that applications are properly handled and evaluated.

Recommendation: We urge NYCHA to set a 30 day time frame for reviewing applications and determining eligibility and to provide greater oversight of the process.

2. Difficult documentation requirements. In order to be eligible, victims must provide three documents – one from each of three categories.

Category A requires proof of an incident of domestic violence within 12 months prior to the application, such as an order of protection, a police report or a hospital report documenting physical violence or a threat of violence;

Category B requires proof of an additional incident involving the same perpetrator that is within 24 months prior to the filing of the application; and

Category C requires an advocacy letter from a social service provider or agency.

For a variety of reasons, these requirements are frequently impossible to meet. Many victims are afraid that calling the police or seeking an order of protection will only jeopardize their safety. Research shows that women are at greatest risk when they are trying to leave their abuser, and taking steps to check his abuse can be perilous. Others are too ashamed or unaware of their rights. Immigrant women often fear that going to the authorities will alert someone to their immigration status; many have batterers who constantly threaten them with deportation. Even at the hospital after a beating, many women are afraid to honestly report what happened to them lest the batterer find out. In fact he may be standing there preventing her from telling the truth. Domestic violence is a vastly underreported crime. If women must provide police reports, hospital reports, orders of protection, statements from the District Attorney or other evidence that they have publicly revealed what batterers typically believe is “private” conduct, too many will be unable to turn to the Section 8 program as a means to escape. We believe that the agency must recognize the barrier these documentation requirements pose and modify them. Further, the documentation requirements are overly complex. It is difficult for victims to understand what documents are required and it is difficult for agency workers

to make proper eligibility determinations. The complexity often leads to improper rejections of applications.

Recommendation: We recommend that the agency modify its requirements so that one report of one incident of actual or threatened violence is enough. For those victims who cannot obtain documentary proof of abuse without putting themselves at risk, we urge the agency to accept an affidavit from the victim describing the abuse and explaining why reporting it would place her in danger. In addition, we recommend additional training for agency workers to assist them with building their skills in making eligibility determinations in domestic violence situations.

3. Requirement that Staten Islanders relocate. Victims living on Staten Island are required to leave the borough altogether in order to secure housing through the VDV program. The four other boroughs limit relocation based on zip code zones, ensuring that victims will live a safe distance from their batterer or from where he knows they live now. Only Staten Island places the entire borough off limits to resident victims. Some of our clients do not apply for the program, in spite of their need, because moving off the Island is too difficult. Staten Island is different in many ways from the other boroughs—it is more rural and, separated from the rest of NYC by an expensive toll bridge or a boat, many residents rarely or never leave. They do not access services off the Island. Quite a few of our clients have special needs children who are connected to services on Staten Island and for whom an out-of-borough move would be too disruptive. Although the population is smaller than the other boroughs, Staten Island is more than twice the size of Manhattan and substantially larger than the Bronx. Yet, Manhattan and Bronx residents can remain in their counties as long as they move to a different zip code zone. In fact a Manhattan resident living just South of Houston Street would be allowed to move anywhere above 59th Street, approximately three miles away. On Staten Island, however, all applicants for the VDV program must relocate to a different borough even though

Staten Island is 58 square miles and a victim could move a reasonable distance away from her batterer. Parts of Brooklyn are also off limits for Staten Islanders.

Recommendation: We urge you to recommend that NYCHA create a new plan to configure Staten Island into zip code zones similar to what is found in the other four boroughs.

Case example. I would like to tell you about Sondra's case, which demonstrates typical problems our clients experience with long delays and improper processing of applications:

In September 2008, SILS submitted a complete Section 8 application for Sondra, a victim of domestic violence. As required, it included documentation that she met the requirements for categories A, B, and C. All documents met the specifications for the program; in fact more documentation was supplied than what is required.

In October, six weeks later, Sondra received a letter from NYCHA stating that it required additional documentation. SILS contacted NYCHA to explain that the submitted documentation met NYCHA requirements. NYCHA stated that there had been an error reviewing Sondra's application and she would receive an approval notice.

In December, two months later, our office contacted NYCHA because Sondra had never gotten an approval notice. NYCHA claimed it did not have Sondra's application and requested that we fax it over, which we did immediately.

In January 2009, one month later, we contacted NYCHA again to check on Sondra's status and were informed that she was approved and given an interview date for later in the month.

A week after Sondra's interview, she received a letter from NYCHA requesting another police report and a letter from her employer verifying her weekly wages.

NYCHA also requested a letter from SILS stating that our office is representing her in a divorce and that her husband is not supporting her. None of these requests were proper.

Again, our office called NYCHA. We were told that only the employer letter was required. Sondra then submitted a letter from her employer.

In March, SILS contacted NYCHA to confirm that the application was finally being processed. We were told that Sondra would get a voucher in the near future.

Several weeks later, Sondra received a letter from NYCHA stating that she is not eligible for Section 8 because she did not turn in all necessary documents.

In April, SILS called NYCHA once again only to learn that Sondra's case had been closed because the letter she submitted from her employer was not notarized.

Several weeks later, at the end of April, SILS accompanied Ms. Silva to the Applications office to deliver a notarized employer letter, despite there being no requirement of a notarized letter.

Finally on May 4, 2009, a full eight months after she applied, Sondra was found eligible. She is scheduled to receive her voucher next week. Then the process of finding an apartment will first begin.

Meanwhile, Sondra's batterer has put extreme pressure on her to vacate the home they once shared. And she worries constantly that she will become homeless before getting her voucher.

Unfortunately, the delays in this case are not an aberration. We have had far too many similar experiences. Some have been even worse.

Further, without a doubt Sondra would never have been approved if she did not have advocates and lawyers calling NYCHA on a regular basis to advocate for her,

explain that her application was complete and argue that additional letters and documents were not required. What happens to domestic violence victims who do not have ongoing assistance from a service provider to ensure that they are ultimately approved?

June 11, 2009
Testimony before the City Council's Women's Issues Committee and Subcommittee on Public Housing: Access to Public Housing for Victims of Domestic Violence
New Destiny Housing Corporation

Good afternoon, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Catherine Trapani and I am the director of the HousingLink Program at New Destiny Housing Corporation, a nonprofit organization that seeks to increase the permanent housing and services available to low-income survivors of domestic violence and others at risk of homelessness.

Access to Public Housing and Section 8 Assistance is of vital importance at this time in New York City's history. The demand for domestic violence shelter has increased markedly since last year. The percentage of families seeking shelter at Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) who entered HRA's domestic violence shelters increased 18.1 percentage points during the first four months of fiscal year 2009 compared to the same period last year¹. Calls to the domestic violence hotline requesting shelter during that same period have increased by 16.1% over last year².

The NYCHA domestic violence priority is an incredibly valuable resource for domestic violence survivors-- both inside and outside of shelter-- who can meet the documentation requirements established by NYCHA. This afternoon, you will hear testimony regarding the many challenges survivors face meeting those standards. New Destiny supports the need for increased flexibility in interpreting the eligibility standards and for a reduced emphasis on criminal justice criteria. Our testimony, however, focuses on the long processing time for NYCHA DV Priority applications --a

¹ Mayor's Preliminary Management Report, HRA

² Safe Horizon Hotline: key indicators data

timeframe that is out alignment with the short maximum length of stay in domestic violence emergency shelters.

In calendar year 2008, 38% of domestic violence emergency shelter residents had the required documentation for the priority and 87% submitted an application while in shelter. **But, even though over one third of the residents qualified for the priority, only 2% of households exiting the domestic violence emergency shelter system left for a NYCHA Section 8 or NYCHA Public Housing apartment³.**

The low placement rate is due in large part to the long processing times for these applications coupled with the short maximum length of stay in emergency shelters (135 days or 4 ½ months).

Even if greater flexibility in criteria is introduced, the impact may be severely limited without a meaningful effort to streamline the application process⁴. Most residents -- almost 70% -- who left emergency shelters were still homeless and often at risk of continued domestic violence⁵.

We recommend that the processing of applications from DV shelters be expedited to align the time frame with the length of stay in emergency shelter. DHS was awarded nearly \$75 million in federal

³ 'Statistics for Advocacy' – data from calendar year 2008 provided by the Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential Providers and analyzed by New Destiny

⁴ There is an extremely small Tier II DV shelter system where the length of stay is 6 months. 'Statistics for Advocacy' survey results show that while only 14% of emergency shelter residents leave shelter with permanent housing, 60% of Tier II shelter residents find permanent housing before their shelter stays' end (including 35% who are placed in Public Housing and Section 8 apartments). Demographics across the two shelter systems including family size, education, work experience and English speaking ability are virtually the same; the only salient difference between the two systems is maximum length of stay in shelter.

⁵ 'Statistics for Advocacy' shows that in calendar year 2008 14% of residents exit DV shelter with permanent housing, an additional 18% are transferred to DV Tier II shelters or other emergency DV shelters leaving 68% without either permanent housing or safe confidential DV shelter leaving them homeless and at risk of further abuse

stimulus funds under the Homeless Prevention Rapid Rehousing Program and pledged in their amendment to the Consolidated Plan to give NYCHA some of this funding to expedite DV priority applications. We strongly encourage NYCHA to work in concert with the DV shelter system (both with HRA which administers the shelter system and with DV shelter providers) when using this funding to ensure that DV shelter applicants are moved through the application process quickly and efficiently so they have access to NYCHA's resources before their shelter stays expire.

With efficiencies in the application process for NYCHA Section 8, we believe that outcomes could be markedly improved thus reducing homelessness and offering life saving stability to survivors of domestic violence who, if allowed to remain homeless after their shelter stays' end could be forced back into dangerous situations. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Contact: Catherine Trapani (646-472-0262 ext. 12; ctrapani@newdestinyhousing.org)
Carol Corden (646-472-0262 ext. 11; ccorden@newdestinyhousing.org)



On behalf of Sanctuary for Families, I would like to thank the members of the Women's Issues Committee and the Subcommittee on Public Housing for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am Silvia Dutchevici, the Director of Sanctuary's Crisis Shelters, and joining me is my colleague, Sonia Mansoor, Sanctuary's Public Benefits Legal Advocate. We represent the largest not-for-profit agency in NYC dedicated exclusively to serving domestic violence victims and their children. Last year, Sanctuary provided over 8,100 victims of domestic violence and their children with shelter, legal consultation and representation, individual and group counseling, case management and economic and housing stability services. Through our extensive outreach, education and awareness raising activities, we reached another 30,000 people.

As Director of Crisis Shelters, I oversee Sanctuary's emergency residential programs, and I work very closely with a Sanctuary colleague who operates our 56-family transitional domestic violence shelter. Day in and day out, we help women and children escape abusive homes by offering them a safe haven in temporary shelter. The victims we see are as diverse as the population of this City. Yet, they all have something in common: a repeated pattern of abuse. They share stories of being subjected to the insidious power and control at the hands of their intimate partners. Blamed by their batterers for the abuse they suffer, controlled in one or more ways--psychologically, physically, sexually and/or economically—these women feel a sense of shame, of hopelessness and fear.

Most people in this room are well aware of the dynamics and far-reaching effects of domestic violence, but it is essential to remind ourselves of the secrecy and shame that often accompany our families' experience of and escape from abuse. It is often this shame and secrecy that prevents victims not only from revealing abuse and seeking help but once they do so, it prevents them from qualifying for permanent housing.

When they do take the courageous and frightening step of leaving their abusers, who likely controlled all the money in the household, they face another, perhaps even more daunting challenge. They are taking the risk that they will not be able to house and feed themselves and their children without him. To escape their abusers, women often need to take the desperate step to make themselves homeless. They may go into shelter or move temporarily into the cramped quarters of family or friends. Sooner

rather than later they will not be welcome on someone couch and if in shelter, their time will be up and they must find safe affordable housing to survive violence free.

That's where the issues before this committee come in. We all know that decent, safe, affordable housing for low income, single parent families in New York City is a rare commodity. For many low income New Yorkers, including domestic violence victims we serve, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is by far the best pathway to find a home of their own, safe from the batterer. And for providing that opportunity for some survivors, we applaud NYCHA's efforts. We were pleased several years ago, when NYCHA revised the eligibility requirements for domestic violence victims and removed some that amounted to insurmountable barriers for most clients. Although these improvements were an important first step, far more change needs to occur to ensure that far more women can seek safety within public housing. Most of victims are still unable to access this precious resource.

Statistics reveal the shocking fact that currently, 60% of domestic violence victims leaving shelters do not even qualify to apply for NYCHA housing. And of the 40% who do qualify, for various reasons we'll explain below, only a tiny percentage are accepted.

The first source of this problem is the impractical and misguided NYCHA eligibility requirements for supporting documentation victims need in order to prove to NYCHA's satisfaction that they are really victims of domestic violence. This is despite the fact that they have qualified for admission to New York City's confidential domestic violence shelter system, having been found credible as being in acute danger without a safe place to live and have been receiving services in those shelters for a significant period of time at significant cost to government..

First of all, if a victim can provide documentation proving she was the victim of a felony, she will be eligible for NYCHA with a supporting letter from a domestic violence advocate. This makes sense in theory, because we have fought long and hard in the domestic violence movement and have made significant progress in getting the criminal justice system to recognize the seriousness of domestic violence. However, most reported domestic violence crimes are characterized on police reports as misdemeanors or even violations. Harassment in the second degree, Aggravated Harassment, Menacing with a weapon, Assaults, and Stalking are all family offenses commonly charged in domestic violence cases. Despite the danger that these acts pose to a victim and her children, all of

them are misdemeanors or violations, not felonies under the New York State Penal law. A domestic violence survivor who has only reported one such crime –possibly after a long history of lesser abuses that were never recorded in a police report, she would not qualify for public housing according to NYCHA’s criteria. If she reported two such misdemeanors or violations, she might have a chance, but she would still face an uphill battle.

Additionally, consider the case of Jackie (not her real name), who fled one domestic violence relationship where she had gotten an order of protection, and found refuge with a new partner. Unfortunately, he too turned abusive. So she left him, and obtained another order of protection, this time against the new partner, but because the violence she suffered was from two different abusers, she did not qualify for the NYCHA Domestic Violence Priority.

We recommend that NYCHA modify its criteria to reflect the reality of criminal acts associated with domestic violence, which fall into the misdemeanor or violation categories.

NYCHA will also accept documentation that reflects a pattern of abuse. We agree with NYCHA that a good assessment for domestic violence should be able to identify a pattern, not just a single incident. We disagree, however, with NYCHA’s requirements for proving that pattern. Unfortunately, NYCHA requires multiple police reports and/or multiple orders of protection, to establish that pattern. In fact, a good family offense petition for an order of protection in family court usually enumerates all of the domestic violence incidents that have occurred over the years. However, NYCHA will not accept a single order of protection that was granted on the basis of a history and pattern. They require at least another order of protection or a police report. Again, it seems logical to ask for multiple police reports, unless you know about how victims behave.

In fact, this flies in the face of everything we know about domestic violence. All the statistics and studies nationwide show that the overwhelming majority of victims do not report their abuse for a long time – due to many factors, including the hope that he will change, the shame and the fear that if they report him, things will get worse. They often wait until some triggering event leads them to reach out for help. We know that the majority of women killed by intimate partners in New York City since 2005 had never reached out for help. And when they do reach out – say by calling 911 – if the police report of that visit does not say there was domestic violence – or, as very frequently occurs

– only says “verbal dispute” or cites it only as a misdemeanor, that report is not considered evidence of a serious enough offense for NYCHA.

Finally, even for those who have reached out to the criminal justice system when things got bad enough, it is very likely that they only have the required documentation for the most recent incident, which may not be the most severe. The documentation they possess, therefore, is not likely to establish a pattern of long-term abuse required by NYCHA to qualify for the Domestic Violence priority.

Consider the case of Maria (not her real name), who recently came to Sanctuary’s shelter with her young child, fleeing a relationship with her child’s father in which she had endured years of serious physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse. Maria’s batterer was very aggressive, controlling and emotionally unstable. On several occasions he threatened to kill himself if she left (he attempted suicide a few times and discussed suicide plans with her frequently). Maria remained trapped in a horrifically abusive relationship for many years, fearful that if she left, he would harm himself, her and their child. Finally, during the last incident of violence, she was badly assaulted physically and she feared for her life. He did not allow her to leave and he threatened to kill himself. This time, Maria had a friend present, who helped her see that she could get help. Maria’s friend called the police, who escorted her out of the apartment and into homelessness.

A domestic incident report was made and Maria was granted a criminal court order of protection with charges of Assault in the 3rd degree. Yet, even though Maria and her child are currently homeless because of domestic violence, and even though the last incident was severe enough for her to obtain an order of protection in criminal court, Maria does not meet the criteria for a NYCHA Domestic Violence Priority. The reason is that due to her fear for the lives of her family that kept her silent, she did not report previous domestic violence incidents and her police report labels the last incident as a misdemeanor. Maria does not have the documentation necessary for the Domestic Violence priority.

We also recommend that NYCHA consider a variety of documents to verify a pattern of abuse exists, including recognizing that a single order of protection may reflect and validate an extended pattern of abuse. In addition, NYCHA should recognize that a police report of violence, even if not felonious, should be accepted as evidence.

One more comment about orders of protection and police reports. Sanctuary has decades of experience in helping thousands of victims obtain orders of protection in Family and Criminal courts, and we have worked well with law enforcement and district attorney's offices to promote accountability for batterers. Sanctuary legal advocates and attorneys are also well-aware that for many domestic violence survivors, going to the police may not be a pathway to safety. In fact, it may incite further violence from their abuser. If he is arrested and released the next day, he will likely be back much angrier and more dangerous. Similarly, if a victim has fled the batterer and lives safely elsewhere or in shelter, getting an order of protection can be the most dangerous thing to do. She will have to serve him for the return date in court, and he will then know where she is and how to find her. And, increasing numbers of batterers come to court and cross move for custody of the children, or to claim she was really the aggressor. Given these facts, it is unjust to force these survivors to seek an order in order to qualify for public housing. To do so knowingly subjects this family to more life-threatening abuse.

Moreover, the mere fact that an order of protection can lead to advantages such as a priority in obtaining public housing has caused the courts to look with skepticism at victims who come to family court seeking one and the validity of their claims is doubted if they are questioned about submitting a copy of the order of protection to NYCHA. If that is not a classic catch 22, I don't know what is.

We recommend that NYCHA consider sworn affidavits by victims, attorneys, social workers and other advocates, as well as other evidence, to verifying a pattern of abuse that should make a victim eligible for public housing

Finally, the addition of a medical "route" to qualify as a domestic violence victim for NYCHA is a welcome part of the 2006 changes the agency made. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene cites domestic violence as one of the top ten public health issues in New York City. During 2005, some 2,200 patients disclosed domestic violence to hospital social workers; and between 3,500 and 4,000 emergency department visits were precipitated by intimate partner violence.¹

NYCHA's requirement for documentation however, only includes hospital admissions rather than usage of emergency rooms for victims. Any victim who is treated and released without being

¹ Human Resources Administration, ODVEIS.

admitted cannot use her hospital records to satisfy this requirement. This creates an insurmountable and illogical obstacle to virtually all domestic violence victims. Broken bones, black eyes, lacerations and abrasions are treated swiftly in the emergency room and the victim is rarely admitted to the hospital. Additionally, the requirement that at the time of the emergency room visit, the victim clearly identifies that the health concern or injury is related to domestic violence and identifies her abuser ignores the reality of most domestic violence cases, as is supported in extensive research.²

Even for those victims who overcome all of the above barriers, their chances of getting NYCHA housing are extremely slim. Many applicants are turned down for minor technical reasons, or bureaucratic errors. Those who are accepted as NYCHA eligible, will have to wait 4-6 months for the application to be processed by NYCHA. In the two years in which I have overseen crisis shelters at Sanctuary, we have had only had one shelter resident who was able to go from a completed application to a move-out into public housing before her 135 day maximum shelter stay had expired.. For shelter residents who max out their time in crisis shelter, this means that while they are waiting, they either have to go into another form of shelter, if they are lucky at a confidential domestic violence transitional shelter, or if not, into the general homeless population, or stay with family or friends at what may not be a safe location. Another casualty of this lengthy waiting period for families in crisis is that oftentimes, required documentation, like a temporary order of protection, expires during the application process. Therefore, the application is rejected by NYCHA. In the worst case, they return to their batterer.

In conclusion we recommend that:

1. Those who have been found eligible for domestic violence shelters should also be automatically eligible for NYCHA housing. Survivors of domestic violence in HRA domestic violence shelters have undergone a stringent screening process to determine their eligibility for confidential domestic violence shelter, including having to demonstrate that they are in acute danger without a safe place for themselves and their children to live.

²However -- since, on a national level, battering represents the single largest cause of serious injury to women ages 18 to 44, accounting for more trauma than automobile accidents, stranger rapes and muggings combined; and since abuse has been strongly linked to a range of additional serious maternal and other health problems-- experts in the field believe that the official New York City records may seriously undercount the incidence of women presenting at hospitals with abuse-related conditions. They note that, in many cases, the woman may be unwilling to state the real reason for her injuries because of fear of reprisals from the abuser; or that hospital staff may not be trained to ask the questions that will uncover abuse in a way that the patient feels safe talking about. Presentation by Catherine Stayton, Acting Director Injury Epidemiology Bureau, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, May 2, 2008.

2. The eligibility requirement that relies on the commission of a felony should be changed so that police reports indicating misdemeanor or violations should be also accepted as sufficient without additional police reports
3. Sworn affidavits from victims themselves and domestic violence advocates who have worked closely with them should be considered as supporting documentation for NYCHA eligibility for Domestic Violence Priority instead of requiring only orders of protection or police reports.
4. Medical records that support a victim's account of a history and pattern of injuries suffered as a result of domestic violence, should be accepted by NYCHA, regardless of whether she was admitted to the hospital or disclosed the true cause of the injury at the time.
5. An expedited approval process should be developed and implemented for domestic violence survivors access to safe, affordable housing and ensure victims a pathway out of abuse.

We thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to testify on an issue so vital to the safety of the most vulnerable New Yorkers, women and children who are victims of domestic violence. We are hopeful that this hearing will help the effort to make NYCHA housing a real pathway to safety for survivors and their children.



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Testimony before the
New York City Council
June 11, 2009

Patrice M. Ejuwa , Member of VOW
VOW recommendations for NYCHA's dv priority

Good afternoon, my name is Patrice C. Queen and I am a survivor of domestic violence. I would like to emphasize survivor as I am fortunate to be standing here before you to tell my story. There are many women who unnecessarily met a tragic fate. I stand here on their behalf to ensure their lives were not taken in vain. I also stand before you as a proud member of the Voices of Women Organizing Project (VOW), a grassroots organization of survivors of domestic violence who organize to improve the systems that abused women rely on for safety and justice.

There are many systems whose response to survivors of domestic violence can stand to be improved however; I am here to concentrate on an issue relevant to accessing NYCHA housing: expanding the allowable documentation requirements.

It is important for us to acknowledge the crucial role NYCHA plays in the recovery process. For many survivors of domestic violence and their children, housing is the difference between life or death. Safe, affordable and permanent housing is one of the single most important resources for a woman trying to leave her abuser. For me and many survivors of domestic violence, housing was the first step in reclaiming our sense of self-determination and stability for ourselves and our children.

Many of the decisions we make as we survive the violence is centered on our children. Deciding to call the police, to press charges, to enforce an escape plan are all contingent upon whether it would be in the best interest of our children. Oftentimes, we decide not to take the steps that the system feels should be taken for instance, calling the police, going to the hospital for evaluation or obtaining an order of protection. This does not mean that we are free from harm or in any less danger than a survivor whose options include what the system requires. What it means is that some of us have circumstances which make our decision making process unique. For those

survivors such as myself who did not or who currently do not have any documented reports of the abuse, we believe the requirements for securing adequate housing are too stringent, do not consider the context and obstacles facing victims of domestic violence, and often force survivors to remain in their abusive relationships thereby, putting themselves and their children's well-being at a significant risk.

The single order of protection against my abuser was not enough to qualify for NYCHA's domestic violence priority. VOW members and survivors report encountering a multitude of obstacles to meeting NYCHA's stringent documentation requirements. It is often dangerous or extremely difficult for victims of domestic violence to obtain police reports or orders of protection. Domestic violence victims contend with fear on a multitude of levels:

- Fear of retribution from their abuser,
- Fear of losing custody of their children for reporting domestic violence,
- Fear their abuser would lose his job when they are dependent on his income or insurance
- Fear of homelessness
- Fear of deportation

One survivor at VOW reported being afraid to go to the police because her abuser was a police officer and who had friends in the law enforcement field. Women commonly report that police reports are not filled out properly and that their witness statements are invalidated or dismissed, thus, making it even harder to access housing. Please understand: an order of protection is no indication of the severity of abuse.

I was abused by my father as an adolescent and then my husband in adulthood. I left my abusive husband to return to New York to take care of an ailing uncle. My abusive father immediately found me and proceeded to stalk me incessantly. For six days he showed up at our house before 8 in the morning. I obtained an order of protection from the court. I got information about housing as a domestic violence victim from Safe Horizon and I went to fill out paper work for Section 8. It was then that I learned I did not have adequate paperwork to qualify for the domestic violence priority; I didn't have prior orders of protection or police reports. Filing that first order of protection after persistent abuse was one of the most difficult things I've ever done.

My story is unique and does not fit the typical mold of what most people would label as a survivors story however; my abuse was real and my life in serious danger. Still I did not qualify for housing which meant the difference between life and death in that my options were few. I received counseling from both Safe Horizon and Mount Sinai's domestic violence programs. Why couldn't either of those agencies prove my domestic violence priority status for housing?

Every survivor's story is different. Every circumstance surrounding that story is uniquely written. Therefore, we can not have a one size fit all solution to such complex problems. It is crucial for NYCHA to continue to explore ways of clearing the pathway to safety for survivors of domestic violence and their children. **It is no exaggeration, safe and affordable housing is a matter of life or death. It is a human right.** Thank you.

VOW recommendations for NYCHA Domestic Violence Priority

VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PRIORITY – DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

Either

Or

Letter from a recognized Domestic Violence shelter acknowledging that Resident qualified for admittance (based on intensive screening process)

Letter from a recognized Domestic Violence Service Provider certifying that the applicant is currently in danger (perpetrator is to be named)

+

ONE of the following:

-Police report documenting either: a domestic incident report (DIR), harassment, or a domestic dispute (within two years) *

-Order of Protection from Criminal Court (within two years)

-Order of Protection from Family Court or Supreme Court (within two years)

-In-Patient hospitalization (within one year)

-ER Visit/ Outpatient visit (with proof of injury, within one year, perpetrator's name is NOT necessary)

-Advocacy letter from the District Attorney's office (within one year)

-Advocacy letter from an ACS preventative program (within one year)

-Advocacy letter from a faith-based or community organization

-Advocacy letter from a Court Dispute Referral Center

-Letter from a doctor outlining bruises or other evidence of abuse

* The two year recommendation is necessary because it may take over a year for a victim of domestic violence to emotionally cope with her traumatic experiences, find housing and leave her batterer. Survivors also reported that the threat of violence escalates and batterers become more violent as the Order of Protection nears expiration.

**TESTIMONY BY NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY BOARD
MEMBER MARGARITA LÓPEZ AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
DIRECTOR NORA REISSIG-LAZZARO,
ACCESS TO PUBLIC HOUSING FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S ISSUES AND
THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING
THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 2009, 11:00 A.M.
COMMITTEE ROOM, CITY HALL**

GOOD MORNING CHAIRPERSON DARLENE MEALY, CHAIRPERSON ROSIE MENDEZ, AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEES. I AM NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY BOARD MEMBER MARGARITA LÓPEZ. JOINING ME TODAY IS NORA REISSIG-LAZZARO, DIRECTOR OF NYCHA'S SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT AND TINA LAM, DIRECTOR OF APPLICATIONS AND TENANCY ADMINISTRATION. WE ARE ALSO JOINED BY CECILE NOEL, EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND EMERGENCY INTERVENTION SERVICES, FROM THE CITY'S HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION.

WE ARE HERE TO TESTIFY ABOUT THE SERVICES THE NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY HAS IN PLACE TO ASSIST VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. LET ME BEGIN WITH A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE HOUSING AUTHORITY.

NYCHA'S MISSION

FOR 75 YEARS, NYCHA HAS PROVIDED PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK. NYCHA OWNS AND OPERATES OVER 178,000 APARTMENTS IN 338 DEVELOPMENTS THROUGHOUT THE CITY, PROVIDING HOMES FOR NEARLY 403,000 LOW- AND MODERATE-INCOME NEW YORKERS.

AS A GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY, NYCHA IS AN ATYPICAL LANDLORD IN THAT, IN ADDITION TO PROVIDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING TO NEW YORKERS, WE HAVE A LONGSTANDING COMMITMENT TO ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF ALL PUBLIC HOUSING RESIDENTS, INCLUDING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, THROUGH THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICES.

THE HOUSING AUTHORITY MANAGES AND MAINTAINS A SCARCE RESOURCE: PUBLIC HOUSING IN NEW YORK CITY. NYCHA'S ANNUAL APARTMENT VACANCY RATE IS LESS THAN ONE PERCENT (IN FACT IT IS 0.66%), WITH MORE THAN 131,000 LOW-INCOME FAMILIES IN NEED CURRENTLY ON NYCHA'S WAITING LIST FOR PUBLIC HOUSING.

WE ARE EXTREMELY PROUD OF OUR RECORD IN PROVIDING HOUSING FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND OFFERING A RICH ARRAY OF SUPPORTIVE SERVICES TO VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES. THIS IS AND CONTINUES TO BE A PRIORITY FOR THE HOUSING AUTHORITY.

GIVEN THE HIGH DEMAND FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING, THE AUTHORITY'S LOW TURN-OVER RATE AND LONG WAITING LISTS, IT IS CRITICAL -- IN FACT IT IS OUR OBLIGATION -- THAT NYCHA HAVE ADMISSIONS STANDARDS AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA TO ENSURE THAT ALL ELIGIBLE FAMILIES HAVE A FAIR OPPORTUNITY TO OBTAIN PUBLIC HOUSING.

HOWEVER, NYCHA IS ALSO HIGHLY SENSITIZED TO THE SERIOUSNESS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE NEEDS OF ITS VICTIMS. IN FACT, NEW APPLICANTS FOR PUBLIC HOUSING WHO ARE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ARE GIVEN THE SECOND HIGHEST PRIORITY FOR ADMISSION INTO PUBLIC HOUSING, AFTER CITY-REFERRED APPLICATIONS FROM THE ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ACS) AND HPD. I WILL NOW ELABORATE ON THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS AS IT RELATES TO VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

ADMISSIONS PROCESS

A VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (VDV) PRIORITY IS ASSIGNED TO APPLICANTS FOR PUBLIC HOUSING WHO PROVIDE THE REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION. ATTACHED TO OUR TESTIMONY IS A COPY OF OUR "GUIDE TO APPLYING FOR PUBLIC HOUSING" THAT DETAILS THE DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS FOR APPLICANTS, INCLUDING VDV's FOR YOUR REVIEW.

A DEDICATED STAFF IN NYCHA'S OFFICE OF APPLICATIONS AND TENANCY ADMINISTRATION HANDLE ALL APPLICATIONS FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TO ENSURE UNIFORMITY AND FAIRNESS IN PROCESSING.

WHEN ISSUES ARISE RELATING TO AN APPLICATION, THE APPLICATION IS ELEVATED TO THE DEPARTMENT'S DIRECTOR FOR REVIEW. THE DEPARTMENT NOTIFIES THE APPLICANT OF DOCUMENTATION THAT IS REQUIRED TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PRIORITY. WHEN APPLICATIONS HAVE NOT MET THE REQUIREMENTS, THE DEPARTMENT PROVIDES FEEDBACK TO REFERRING AGENCIES INDICATING ANY ISSUE WITH THE APPLICATION.

FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WHO ALREADY LIVE IN PUBLIC HOUSING AND NEED TO RELOCATE, NYCHA HAS AN EMERGENCY TRANSFER PROGRAM, WHICH I WILL NOW DESCRIBE.

EMERGENCY TRANSFER PROGRAM

THE AUTHORITY'S EMERGENCY TRANSFER PROGRAM OFFERS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RESIDENTS OF PUBLIC HOUSING AND THEIR AUTHORIZED FAMILY MEMBERS, WHO QUALIFY AS VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, TO CONFIDENTIALLY RELOCATE FROM THEIR PRESENT DEVELOPMENT TO ANOTHER DEVELOPMENT. DURING THIS PROCESS, WE PROVIDE A RANGE OF SUPPORT SERVICES, WHICH WE WILL ELABORATE ON IN A MOMENT.

EXAMPLES OF OUR DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS FOR THE EMERGENCY TRANSFER PROGRAM INCLUDE: AN ORDER OF PROTECTION; POLICE REPORT DOCUMENTING A CRIMINAL OFFENSE; A LETTER FROM EITHER AN NYPD DETECTIVE OR PAROLE OFFICER; HOSPITAL ADMISSION OR DISCHARGE DOCUMENTS; MEDICAL RECORDS DOCUMENTING INJURIES; AN EMERGENCY TRANSFER REFERRAL PACKAGE FROM SAFE HORIZON OR FROM THE NY DISTRICT ATTORNEY OR U.S. ATTORNEY.

A FULL DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS FOR OUR EMERGENCY TRANSFER PROGRAM CAN BE FOUND ON NYCHA'S WEBSITE, UNDER COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

MODIFICATIONS TO THE PROCESS

WORKING WITH THE MAYOR'S OFFICE, RESIDENTS, AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVOCATES, THE HOUSING AUTHORITY HAS MODIFIED ITS POLICIES TO ALLOW VDV EMERGENCY TRANSFERS (AS WELL AS APPLICANTS) THE OPTION OF RELOCATING WITHIN THEIR BOROUGH (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF STATEN ISLAND). THE CHANGE ALLOWS VDV's TO REMAIN IN THEIR BOROUGH WHERE THEY HAVE ESTABLISHED LOCAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS, WHILE ENSURING GEOGRAPHIC DISTANCE FROM ABUSERS.

PREVIOUSLY, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS WERE REQUIRED TO LEAVE THEIR BOROUGH OF RESIDENCE AS A CONDITION OF RELOCATION FOR SAFETY PURPOSES. THIS IS STILL THE CASE FOR STATEN ISLAND BECAUSE ITS SIZE MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR THE VICTIM TO RELOCATE SAFELY.

NOW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRANSFEREES (AND APPLICANTS) IN EVERY BOROUGH, EXCEPT STATEN ISLAND, MAY CHOOSE TO STAY IN THEIR CURRENT BOROUGH OF RESIDENCY.

TO ENHANCE AND ACCELERATE OUR PROCESSES FURTHER, NYCHA HAS ALSO CHANGED ITS POLICY SUCH THAT VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STATUS CAN BE BASED ON A SINGLE FELONY OFFENSE THAT RESULTED IN SERIOUS INJURY, RATHER THAN TWO INCIDENTS AS PREVIOUSLY REQUIRED.

NYCHA ALSO INCREASED THE AMOUNT OF TIME THAT POLICE REPORTS MAY COVER AS PART OF THE REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION. IN OTHER WORDS, APPLICANTS USED TO HAVE TO SUBMIT POLICE REPORTS NO OLDER THAN 12 MONTHS. THEY MAY NOW GO BACK 24 MONTHS. FOR TRANSFERS, WE CHANGED OUR REQUIREMENTS FROM POLICE REPORTS THAT ARE NO OLDER THAN SIX MONTHS TO REPORTS THAT ARE NO OLDER THAN 12 MONTHS. THIS WAS DONE TO FACILITATE OBTAINING THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PRIORITY BY ALLOWING MORE HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION TO BE USED WHILE STILL ESTABLISHING THE CLAIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITH SUBSTANTIATING DOCUMENTATION.

TO ASSIST VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AS WELL AS ALL APPLICANTS FOR PUBLIC HOUSING WHO HAVE LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY, BI-LINGUAL STAFF ARE AVAILABLE AT NYCHA APPLICATION OFFICES OR ACCESSIBLE THROUGH NYCHA'S LANGUAGE BANK WHICH OFFERS THE RESOURCE OF OVER 140 LANGUAGES, OR THROUGH THE USE OF LANGUAGE LINE.

IT IS ALSO WORTH NOTING HERE THAT PUBLIC HOUSING APPLICANTS, RESIDENTS AND HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS WHO ARE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, DATING VIOLENCE, OR STALKING ARE PROTECTED FROM DISCRIMINATION BY THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT WHICH CONGRESS PASSED IN 2006. THIS LAW PROTECTS VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FROM BEING EVICTED OR DENIED HOUSING ASSISTANCE BASED ON ACTS OF VIOLENCE COMMITTED AGAINST THEM.

NYCHA'S DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES, NORA REISSIG-LAZZARO, WILL NOW DESCRIBE SOME OF THE SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAMS IN PLACE TO ASSIST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS WHO LIVE IN PUBLIC HOUSING.

GOOD MORNING, CHAIRPERSON MEALY, CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEES...

NYCHA PROGRAMS FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

AS COMMISSIONER LÓPEZ MENTIONED, NYCHA OFFERS A RANGE OF SERVICES DESIGNED TO PROTECT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THROUGH ITS SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT. THESE INCLUDE:

- THE AFTERCARE PROGRAM, WHICH OFFERS SERVICES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS APPROVED FOR AN EMERGENCY TRANSFER. THIS PROGRAM WAS CREATED BASED ON THE RECOGNITION THAT OFTEN IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO SIMPLY RELOCATE SOMEONE FROM POINT A TO POINT B. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS WHO ARE IN THE PROCESS OF RELOCATING TO ESCAPE FROM VIOLENCE FREQUENTLY NEED SUPPORTIVE SERVICES TO HELP WITH WHAT WE CALL THE PRE-TRANSFER, TRANSITIONAL AND POST-TRANSFER PHASES.

TO THIS END, THE AFTERCARE PROGRAM RECEIVES REFFERALS DIRECTLY FROM NYCHA'S EMERGENCY TRANSFER STAFF OF EVERY APPROVED VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRANSFER AT THE TIME OF APPROVAL OF THE TRANSFER REQUEST.

THE PROGRAM'S GOALS ARE TO PROVIDE NECESSARY ASSISTANCE SO THAT VICTIMS DO NOT RETURN TO THE FAMILIARITY OF THEIR ABUSERS, GET HELP IN BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE AND HELP KEEP THE FAMILY SAFE DURING THE TRANSFER PROCESS. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE FAMILY'S NEEDS IS CONDUCTED AND AN ACTION PLAN IS DEVELOPED WITH THE SURVIVOR TO HELP IDENTIFY GOALS. THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO ASSIST THE SURVIVOR IN REACHING SELF SUFFICIENCY WHILE LEADING A VIOLENCE FREE LIFE. THE PROGRAM PROVIDES THE FOLLOWING:

- COUNSELING AND SAFETY PLANNING PRIOR TO MOVING INTO ANOTHER DEVELOPMENT;
- SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY AT THE APARTMENT OFFER AND MOVE IN STAGE;
- SUPPORTIVE COUNSELING TO MAINTAIN STABILITY AT THE NEW DEVELOPMENT;
- EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND COUNSELING FOR CHILDREN AFFECTED BY THE VIOLENCE.
- INFORMATION, REFERRALS, AND ADVOCACY AT POST TRANSFER TO HELP ACHIEVE LONG TERM GOALS SUCH AS JOB TRAINING/PLACEMENT, HIGHER EDUCATION ETC.;
- AND MATERIAL ASSISTANCE IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS, SUCH AS FOOD, BABY SUPPLIES, AND METRO CARDS.

- THE WITNESS RELOCATION PROGRAM PROCESSES AND EXPEDITES TRANSFER REQUESTS FOR INTIMIDATED WITNESSES INCLUDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS WHO ARE COOPERATING IN THE PROSECUTION OF THE BATTERER;
- THE SUPPORTIVE OUTREACH SERVICES (SOS) PROGRAM IS ALSO OFFERED THROUGH NYCHA'S SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT. THIS PROGRAM USES A HOME VISIT BASED MODEL TO PROVIDE CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES ON A VARIETY OF ISSUES INCLUDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.
- THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTION, EDUCATION AND PREVENTION PROGRAM (DVIEP) HAS PROVIDED COMPREHENSIVE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES TO NYCHA RESIDENTS FOR OVER 17 YEARS. THIS PROGRAM IS ADMINISTERED BY THE HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION (HRA) WITH FUNDING FROM THE CITY COUNCIL, FOR WHICH WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL. THE SERVICE PROVIDER IS SAFE HORIZON. DVIEP IS A RECOGNIZED NATIONAL LEADER FOR POLICE DEPARTMENTS ACROSS THE NATION IN THEIR APPROACH TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

THROUGH THE DVIEP PROGRAM, OUTREACH IS CONDUCTED TO NYCHA HOUSEHOLDS WHERE A REPORT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HAS BEEN MADE IN POLICE SERVICE AREAS (PSAs) ACROSS THE CITY.

- DURING 2008, A TOTAL OF 10,886 REPORTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WERE MADE BY NYCHA RESIDENTS. OUTREACH WAS CONDUCTED TO EACH OF THESE HOUSEHOLDS BY ANY COMBINATION OF THE FOLLOWING: LETTERS, PHONE CALLS, AND HOME VISITS. ALSO PRESENTATIONS ON THE TOPIC OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WERE CONDUCTED IN NYCHA COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE CITY.
- A PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN HAS PLACED POSTERS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MANAGEMENT OFFICES, COMMUNITY CENTERS AND OTHER VISIBLE PLACES FREQUENTED BY RESIDENTS CITY-WIDE INFORMING THEM WHERE TO GET HELP.
- BOROUGH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CONFERENCES FOR RESIDENTS: IN RECOGNITION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH, NYCHA'S SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT PROVIDES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CONFERENCES IN EACH BOROUGH FOR RESIDENTS OF PUBLIC HOUSING. THE CONFERENCES ARE HELD IN OCTOBER OF EVERY YEAR AND HAVE AN ATTENDANCE OF OVER 200 RESIDENTS FROM EACH BOROUGH. THIS YEAR'S

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CONFERENCE THEME: "NYCHA RESIDENT LEADERS: A UNITED RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE," IS AIMED AT PROVIDING RESIDENT LEADERS EDUCATION ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TO HELP RAISE AWARENESS, PROVIDE COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND ASSIST RESIDENT LEADERS IDENTIFY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS SO THAT THEY CAN BECOME COMMUNITY-BASED RESOURCES FOR RESIDENTS IN THEIR DEVELOPMENTS.

- COLLABORATION WITH THE MAYOR'S OFFICE TO COMBAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: NYCHA WORKS WITH THIS OFFICE TO ENSURE THAT RESIDENTS CONTINUE TO RECEIVE INFORMATION ON THE AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES THROUGH THE SAFE HORIZON HOTLINE.

I WILL NOW TURN THE TESTIMONY BACK OVER TO COMMISSIONER LOPEZ.

CONCLUSION

TO CONCLUDE, NYCHA HAS PROCEDURES AND PROGRAMS IN PLACE TO HELP PROTECT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WHO ARE BOTH NEW APPLICANTS TO PUBLIC HOUSING AS WELL AS TRANSFERS WITHIN PUBLIC HOUSING. WE KNOW THAT THROUGH OUR DIRECTLY PROVIDED SERVICES AND COLLABORATIONS WITH OTHER CITY AGENCIES, NYCHA HAS A STRONG PROGRAM IN PLACE TO ENSURE THAT ALL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO PROTECT THIS POPULATION.

AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, WE ARE EXTREMELY PROUD OF OUR RECORD IN PROVIDING HOUSING AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES TO VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR FAMILIES. THIS IS AND CONTINUES TO BE A PRIORITY FOR THE HOUSING AUTHORITY.

LET ME CONCLUDE HERE AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE.



20 Years of Providing

Homes, Jobs, and Services for America's Homeless

Over 150,000 People Helped Since 1986

Housing Programs
Bridges to Permanent Housing
Domestic Violence Housing
Emergency Housing
Fair Housing Justice Center
HomeBase Homeless Prevention
Permanent Housing
Transitional Housing
Veterans' Housing

Job Training
Building Maintenance
Computer
Culinary Arts
Entrepreneurial
Life Skills
Office and Computer Skills
Placement and Retention Services
Security

Support Services
Client Case Management Services
Domestic Violence Services
Employment Services
GED Classes
HIV/AIDS Support Services
Housing Assistance
Medical Services
Mental Health Services
Substance Abuse Counseling
Veteran Services

Youth Services
Mentoring USA
After School Programs
Daycare
Early Childhood Education

Housing Facilities
Bronx, NY
HELP Bronx Crotona
HELP Bronx Morris
Brooklyn, NY
Genesis Homes
Genesis Neighborhood Plaza
HELP
HELP Brownsville Women's Center
HELP New Horizons
HELP Women's Center
Buffalo, NY
Hickory Street Apartments
Houston, TX
Corder Place Apartments
Las Vegas, NV
HELP Las Vegas Apartments for Veterans
HELP Las Vegas Genesis Apartments
HELP Las Vegas Plaza
HELP St. Vincent
Manhattan, NY
Genesis Robert F. Kennedy Apartments
HELP Harbor
HELP Haven
HELP Supportive Employment Center
Nassau County, NY
HELP Equity Homes
Philadelphia, PA
Genesis Square Apartments
Genesis Square Townhouses
Suffolk County, NY
HELP Suffolk
Scattered-Site Housing
Westchester County, NY
WestHELP Greenburgh
WestHELP Mount Vernon

Testimony of HELP USA

Before the City Council's Committees on Public Housing and Women's Issues

June 11, 2009

My name is Nicola Eason and I offer this testimony on behalf of

HELP USA – one of the City's largest providers of low-income and transitional housing – including emergency and transitional housing and supportive services to survivors of domestic violence. I am the Assistant Executive Director of HELP Haven – an 85 bed emergency shelter for survivors of domestic violence – and HELP Harbor – an 185 bed transitional shelter for survivors of domestic violence. I want to thank the New York City Council for holding this hearing and providing us an opportunity to discuss barriers victims of domestic violence face in accessing public and subsidized housing.

The interconnected nature of domestic violence and homelessness is well-established – 92% of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives, and 63% have been victims of domestic violence as adults.¹ Moreover, domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness in New York City.²

One of the most important facts that HELP USA has learned from working with hundreds of survivors of domestic violence, is this – there is no “typical” case of domestic violence. Domestic violence cuts across all racial,

¹ Browne, A. Spring 1998. “Responding to the Needs of Low Income and Homeless Women Who are Survivors of Family Violence.” Journal of American Medical Women's Association, 53(2): 57-64.

² Kaufman, Lisa. October 30, 2008. “Record Number of Families Seeking Refuge in Shelters.” The New York Times, p. A35.

ethnic and socio-economic groups. It takes on many forms, including – punches, slaps, threats of physical harm, financial control, rape, emotional abuse, and threats of deportation. Accordingly, there is no “one size fits all” safety plan for victims – each victim’s safety plan must be individualized. Some safety plans include seeking orders of protection, some do not. Some safety plans include calling the police some do not. A victim of domestic violence is in the best position to determine what will keep herself and her children safe.

Because of the current documentation requirements for domestic violence priority housing, many victims of domestic violence are ineligible and thus, left with fewer options of securing safe and permanent housing for their families. Moreover, victims’ safety can be compromised because they feel forced to make decisions based not on what will keep them safe, but what will provide them with permanent housing. For example, we worked with a victim of domestic violence whose batterer told her that if she ever went to the police or to the courts, he would kill her and their children. As a result, although she has suffered extreme physical abuse – including marital rape, emotional abuse, and periods of forced starvation, she never called the police or sought an order of protection, fearing that these actions would in fact, escalate the violence. Consequently, under the current documentation requirements she does not qualify for domestic violence priority housing.

HELP USA respectfully encourages the creation of a task force (that would include NYCHA, the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence, HRA, domestic violence shelter providers and advocacy organizations) to research and make recommendations to the City Council regarding the implementation of a framework for

eligibility for domestic violence priority housing that is more flexible and respects victims' decision-making in regards to safety planning. HELP USA would be happy to work with NYCHA and the City Council to accomplish this goal and we thank you for this opportunity to address this vital and life-saving issue for victims of domestic violence.

Good morning. My name is Cynthia Dansby, and I am the Director of Quality Improvement for the Center Against Domestic Violence. I am testifying on behalf of Judith Kahan, our CEO who is on vacation.

I would like to thank the Women's Issues Committee and the Public Housing Subcommittee of the City Council for holding these much needed hearings.

I suspect that everyone who testifies here today (except maybe NYCHA) is going to tell you the same thing – that NYCHA's current documentation requirements for the domestic violence priority are too restrictive. On several occasions the Coalition of Residential Domestic Providers has provided an analysis of NYCHA's criteria and the inability of the majority of domestic violence shelter residents to meet them.

Rather than repeat this information, I want to illustrate the problem by telling you a few stories. Although the victims in these stories are women, and the batterers are men, I don't want, in any way, to minimize or ignore the experiences of male victims. The pronouns in these stories could easily be reversed, without changing any other details.

Ms. F. has been married 9 years and has 2 children under the age of 5. She and her husband moved here several years ago from another country because of his job. She has no friends or family here. Ms. F's husband is extremely abusive and controlling. The only time she tried to call the police for help, he took the phone from her and smashed it.

When she came into our shelter, Ms. F. was advised by an attorney not to seek an order of protection. It is important to understand that it is not unusual that filing for an order of protection increases the level of danger faced by the victim. The order can be filed in the borough where the abuse occurred or in the borough where the victim is residing. If it is filed in the borough where the abuse occurred there are tremendous opportunities for the batterer or his friends to accost her on the way to and from court. If the order is filed in the borough where she is currently residing, then it narrows the batterer's search. In either case, the victim will be forced to confront the batterer in court on multiple occasions, and he will have the opportunity to stalk her and locate the shelter.

Ms. F's husband filed a court order to compel the Department of Education to provide him with the name and location of the school to which his children had been transferred. The Department of Education contacted the Domestic Violence Unit at HRA to inform them of this, and stated that unless Ms. F. obtained an order of protection they would have to release the information. Ms. F went to family court and got a temporary order of protection.

In the process, someone slipped up, and the batterer was able to locate her at our shelter. We became aware of this when a process server showed up to serve her with papers for a custody case initiated by the batterer. It is common for batterers who have no particular interest in their children to file for custody as a way of regaining control over a partner who has left them.

Because she was located, Ms. F had to be transferred to another domestic violence shelter. Ms. F's batterer is educated and sophisticated. This makes him much more dangerous.

Ms. F has an order of protection, but because she has no police report, she is not eligible for the NYCHA Domestic Violence priority. Unfortunately, it is our hope that she does not become eligible because this would mean that her batterer had located her again and had injured or threatened her. The point of entering domestic violence shelter is for the victim to be safe – to hide from the batterer so that they and not be exposed to more violence.

The second story that I want to tell you is about a 30 year old woman who was married for 12 years and who has 4 children. She sustained serious physical injuries on many occasions including a long knife cut on her face, but never went to the hospital because she was afraid it would make things worse. After entering shelter she obtained an order of protection. During her shelter stay, she encountered her batterer on a subway platform and he attempted to push her onto the tracks. Some bystanders intervened. Unfortunately, when the police filled out the DIR they categorized the incident as "harassment." Shelter staff advocated for the police to change the DIR, but were unsuccessful. In order for the police report to meet NYCHA's DV Priority requirements, it must indicate at least "aggravated harassment." It is not unusual for the police to put a lower charge on a DIR, especially when they did not witness the event themselves.

Since batterers are unlikely to assault their partners in front of the police, many victims, even though they have multiple police reports remain ineligible for the DV Priority.

There are many stories that illustrate many nuances of problems with the DV Priority requirements as they now exist.

All of them are about families who are in enough danger to leave their homes and go into hiding and DV Shelters, and ultimately all of them result in these families being denied access to NYCHA housing in a timely manner.

Thank you.

Cynthia A. Dansby
Director of Quality Improvement
The Center Against Domestic Violence



Yisroel Schulman, Esq.
President & Attorney-In-Charge

Access to Public Housing for Victims of Domestic Violence

June 11, 2009

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak about public housing issues impacting domestic violence victims in NYC. My name is Lisa Rivera and I am the associate director of the Matrimonial and Family Law Unit at the New York Legal Assistance Group, a not for profit civil legal services organization where we represent domestic violence victims in a wide variety of cases including family law, housing, public benefits, and immigration. Also, with me is Shari Morris a staff attorney from our housing project, who is appearing today on behalf of Kamilla Sjodin, who is unable to attend.

We are here today to urge the City Council to change the necessary documentation criteria for public housing applications, to increase the stay in either emergency or Tier II shelters for domestic violence victims and ask for an increase in transitional housing.

When thinking of domestic violence (DV), many think of the physical and emotional abuse that the abuser inflicts. Victims of domestic violence, however, also face additional obstacles. They may never have had control of their own finances, or were prevented from working, may have few employment options after leaving their abusers, been prevented from going to school, have no child care, been isolated from friends and family and may not speak English. These realities affect their ability to navigate the system. Victims of DV face a higher risk of abuse at separation. This makes temporary and permanent housing for DV victims crucial. Despite the dire need for permanent housing, there are many obstacles ranging from enormous delays in the application process to onerous requirements to document their abuse.

According to New Destiny Housing Corporation (who will be testifying today), only 18% of domestic violence survivors leave emergency shelters for permanent housing. Without permanent housing these victims become trapped and must choose between continued violence or homelessness. Because *not enough* viable options for permanent housing exist, victims will be forced to make difficult decisions. Over half of homeless mothers in New York City have a history of domestic violence (Coalition for the Homeless, May 2003). This simply cannot continue.

Currently New York City offers beds in domestic violence shelters for victims, who, under Local Law 43, cannot be denied space in a shelter due to lack of documentary evidence. (New York City Charter, Code, Amendments & Rules, New York City Local Laws, Local Law No. 43, 2002, In. 120-A). Unlike for Section 8 or Public Housing, lack of a police report or Order of Protection will not preclude a domestic violence victim from obtaining a place in a New

York City shelter. Only when the victim attempts to leave the shelter in order to secure permanent housing are these requirements imposed.

This is counterintuitive. If these documents were not required (for good reason) when she entered the shelter, it seems unlikely that the passage of time would make the documents more accessible given that she has left her home with little belongings and cut off ties to her previous life to remain safe from her abuser. As a result, better criteria for enabling the Housing Authority to identify DV victims for permanent housing applications must be developed.

Documentation requirements are an understandable effort by NYCHA to give housing to the most needy DV victims, but these requirements do not achieve that goal. Domestic violence victims are required to present fewer documents than a regular applicant when applying for Public Housing or Section 8 housing. These accommodations, however, do not ameliorate the extremely onerous application process.

They are mandated to produce police reports, court documents, hospital records, and advocacy letters. As we know, they must present *two* “primary” documents in addition to an advocacy letter. Only victims of “serious felonies” are asked to submit one primary document (*police report/family court order/order of protection/hospital inpatient record/Court Dispute Referral Center Letter/Letter from a DA or NYPD Detective*) and one advocacy letter. However, if a felony was committed it’s likely the victim would have more documents available to them as opposed to the “non-felony” case.

Therefore, victims of domestic violence are expected not only to understand which documents are required to be presented with their application, but they also must gather these documents from various sources, or worse, retrieve them directly from the home or neighborhood they may have shared with the abuser. Worse still, these documents can be sophisticated in nature, making locating and retrieving them even more burdensome.

The biggest problem with the current required documents is that many domestic violence victims never step foot inside a police precinct, a hospital, or a court room. They are ashamed, embarrassed, terrified of retaliation or prevented by their abuser from seeking help. Moreover, the current criteria assumes that the victim will report abuse *before* she has even fled for her safety, even though we know that simply is not the case for many victims. It is sometimes simply not safe to do so. Therefore, even with the so-called accommodations set forth above, permanent housing still eludes countless domestic violence victims.

Consequently, we are recommending a change in the application process for domestic violence victims and urge the City Council to adopt the use of a victim statement as proof that abuse exists. Federal programs already include such provisions. For example, even the United States Citizen and Immigration Service has no required set of documents needed in applications for victims seeking status under the Violence Against Women Act. While USCIS provides a list of example documents, most of the documents are “suggested” and all are not required as proof. This list includes, but is not limited to, documents already asked for by the Housing Authority. However, USCIS does ask for a victim statement that outlines the abuse she faced and this alone can be sufficient proof for immigration purposes. Therefore, we ask that you adopt the victim statement as proof along with the advocacy letter.

This need for flexibility in documentation criteria reflects the realities of the victims I work with. Most importantly, this will recognize the fact that many victims don't report abuse until they feel safe to do so. For many, this is when they seek temporary housing in the shelter system.

We are also joining with others in recommending extending the maximum stay for domestic violence victims in emergency and Tier II shelter system.

According to NYCHA, as of April 30, 2009, there were 131,077 families on the waiting list for Conventional Public Housing (*including 14,107 who were in the certification process*) and 127,825 families on the waiting list for a Section 8 voucher (*including 2,800 who were in the certification process*). Additionally, it is virtually impossible to establish an average waiting time for an applicant applying for a Section 8 voucher and Public Housing and the process could take anywhere from a few months to several years for approval. (NYCHA Fact Sheet)

A domestic violence victim is only able to apply for permanent housing through New York City after 42 days in the emergency shelter, although sometimes victims are allowed to apply after only 21 days. (Schwartz & Stapel). Domestic violence victims are allowed a maximum of 135 days in emergency shelter.

As a result of lengthy approval delays, many victims reach their maximum stay without a resolution to their housing needs. Consequently, victims are forced to start the process again by applying for shelter with the Department of Homeless Services, turn to the streets for shelter, or endanger their lives because they have no choice but to return to their abuser. Given the knowledge the City has about the delays domestic violence victims face for approval, the expectation that permanent housing would be available after only 135 days with cannot possibly be seen as reasonable. Therefore, the time for stays in shelter must be extended to reflect reality and a plan should be created to accelerate the process because of the risks discussed earlier.

Similarly, there are times in which a domestic violence victim is already residing in public housing and must go to a shelter in order to escape her abuser. Though it is possible to transfer to different housing in cases where there is domestic violence, the wait time for such a transfer may be lengthy. During the waiting period, it is possible that the victim will not only have to pay rent for the apartment from which she fled, but also pay rent to the shelter. This certainly seems inequitable and creates yet another hardship.

Lastly, we would be remiss in not bringing forward the problems with section 8 vouchers that DV victims face. Landlords frequently turn away women who have orders of protections or other indications of domestic violence (National Coalition Against DV (2003)). Furthermore, despite Local Law 10's prohibition against discriminating against a prospective tenant because of his or her source of income, many landlords are turning away those that have a section 8 voucher. This is particularly problematic for DV victims since the vouchers are likely the only way they can afford to escape their abusers and move on with their lives. While denial of the vouchers are clearly in violation of Local Law 10, the remedy available in cases like this do not necessarily help the potential tenant as one of the only ways to force the landlord to accept the

voucher is to commence a lawsuit against them. However, this then creates a difficult living situation for the tenant, who only got into the apartment by suing the landlord – thus ostensibly creating a new hurdle in the victim's quest for safety.

Thank you.



Yisroel Schulman, Esq.
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June 11, 2009

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According to New Destiny Housing Corporation (who will be testifying today), only 18% of domestic violence survivors leave emergency shelters for permanent housing. Without permanent housing these victims become trapped and must choose between continued violence or homelessness. Because *not enough* viable options for permanent housing exist, victims will be forced to make difficult decisions. Over half of homeless mothers in New York City have a history of domestic violence (Coalition for the Homeless, May 2003). This simply cannot continue.

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Therefore, victims of domestic violence are expected not only to understand which documents are required to be presented with their application, but they also must gather these documents from various sources, or worse, retrieve them directly from the home or neighborhood they may have shared with the abuser. Worse still, these documents can be sophisticated in nature, making locating and retrieving them even more burdensome.

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Consequently, we are recommending a change in the application process for domestic violence victims and urge the City Council to adopt the use of a victim statement as proof that abuse exists. Federal programs already include such provisions. For example, even the United States Citizen and Immigration Service has no required set of documents needed in applications for victims seeking status under the Violence Against Women Act. While USCIS provides a list of example documents, most of the documents are “suggested” and all are not required as proof. This list includes, but is not limited to, documents already asked for by the Housing Authority. However, USCIS does ask for a victim statement that outlines the abuse she faced and this alone can be sufficient proof for immigration purposes. Therefore, we ask that you adopt the victim statement as proof along with the advocacy letter.

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voucher is to commence a lawsuit against them. However, this then creates a difficult living situation for the tenant, who only got into the apartment by suing the landlord – thus ostensibly creating a new hurdle in the victim's quest for safety.

Thank you.



39 Bowery, PMB 375
New York NY 10002

Admin: (212) 732-0054
Fax: (212) 587-5731

**Testimony for City Council Hearings on NYCHA DV Priority
on June 11, 2009**

Dear New York City Housing Authority:

My name is Vivian Lin. I work for New York Asian Women's Center as a housing case manager, I am here to testify on behalf of victims of domestic violence. DV clients want to leave shelter from the very first day of entering the shelter, and they want to live on their own by obtaining NYHCA housing. NCYAH housing is a great benefit for all DV clients. However, there are some strict requirements keep clients waiting a very long time to get the NCYAH housing in order to secure their safety. Many clients who have stayed in the DV shelter over 135 days and they have to go back to their abusers because they have lost hope to achieve NYCHA housing.

Question 1, can NYCHA change the time limited required to submit a valid Order of Protection ?

In NYCHA category A indicates that criminal court and Family court order of protection must be valid at the time of application filing, priority upgrade request and day of eligibility interview. However, Temporary Orders of Protection can expire soon before the application is coded as DV priority. As a result, NYCAH will send the application form back to the clients and request for new Order of Protection. As we know, the valid time of a Temporary Orders of Protection is determined by the Court. Usually judges only give less than 30 days to clients for the next court date for the OP renewal, and NYCHA usually will spend almost 2 months to schedule an eligibility interview for clients. Also, this is especially true for criminal court orders which expire quickly and may not get renewed if the batterer is incarcerated. In addition, housing case managers

need time to get documentation completed before submitting to NYCHA. Can NYCHA not be so strict with the timeline requirement for valid OP; instead of requesting clients to have new Order of Protection when they have their eligibility interview? If so, I believe many clients will move to NYCHA housing quicker.

Question 2, can NYCHA accept police report which indicates “harassment”?

Certain police report will not be accepted as appropriated documentation by NYCHA when “harassment” or “verbal dispute” are indicated in police report. The truth is police officers don’t always write DIRs correctly. For instance, they will leave it “blank”, or they will issue reports as “harassment” when injuries were invisible at the time. They will issue reports as “verbal dispute” because the abuser threatened client by hurting himself. Therefore, our clients will have to go back to precinct to upgrade the charges in their police reports. In addition, many clients who don’t even know how to tell police accurately what happen to them because of shock, fears, or language barriers at the time.

Question 3, can NYCHA has a point person to be a responsible person when some thing goes wrong ?

I currently have a client Ms. A, and she is waiting for her NYCHA housing over two years already because NYCHA had made a lot of mistakes on Ms. A’s case. Here is what had happened to Ms. A.

- **In March, 2007**, Ms. A came to NYAWC requesting for assistance including housing service.
- **In May, 2007** Ms. A submitted her application to NYCHA,
- **In August, 2007** she had an eligibility interview but was denied. NYCHA’s reason for denying her application was NYCHA didn’t accept her children’s father support as a source of income.
- About **November, 2007**, Ms. A’s PA became active, and she re-submitted documentation to NYCHA.
- **In December, 2007** NYCHA said her expense was higher than her P.A. income. Therefore, Ms. A was denied again. However, Ms. A had her own saving because she just stopped working in July 2007. Also, Ms. A received the children support and family contribution.
- **In Jan, 2008**, NYCHA informed Ms. A to attend an informal hearing.
- **In August, 2008**, Ms. A attended hearing and won. NYCHA was found to have miscounted her P.A. income.
- After waiting 19 months, on **March, 2009**, Ms. A had second eligibility interview.

- **In April, 2009**, Ms. A received both letters informing of her eligibility for both NYCHA public and section 8 housing.
- **In May, 2009**, Ms. A received a notice letter informing her that NYCHA Albany development had an available apartment for her. However, when she tried to make a rental interview with that development, she was told that the notice letter was not for her because the computer system made mistakes.
- **In May, 2009**, at Queens section 8 briefing office, Ms. A was not allowed to attend the section 8 Briefing appointment because she didn't speak accurate English. My client was discriminated.
- **Three days ago**, Ms. A was told that because she didn't respond the notice letter from NYCHA Albany development within 10 days, therefore her name was no longer on the waiting list. Her name was put on the borough wide waiting list again.

Now, Ms. A is waiting for second section 8 briefing. However, no one can tell her how long it is going to be scheduled. In addition, as we can see that Ms. A has been through a tough time. She called me and was crying on the phone stating that "why this always happens to her." I had responded by calling section 8 rental unit many times and also NYCHA Correspondence Unit; I was referred back and forth from one unit to the other over and over. So far, we still could not find the right answer for her. From the first time Ms. A submitted her application to NYCHA until now, two years passed already, and Ms. A and her two twin sons who are four years old are living in a basement.

I highly urge NYCHA to pay attention on Ms. A's case and thank NYCHA for listening to all of DV clients' voices!!

Sincerely
Vivian Lin

Housing Case Manager
New York Asian Women's Center
39 Bowery PMB 375 N.Y. NY 10002
Phone: 1-212-732-0054x121
Fax: 1-212-587-5731

City Council
June 11, 2009

Testimony by Bonnie Genevich, Division Director
Good Shepherd Services' Safe Homes Project

Survivors who seek emergency shelter to escape domestic terrorism have one thread of hope at the end of their traumatic journey. That is simply the anticipation of finding a safe and permanent home for themselves, and in most cases, their children. The extremely short stay in emergency shelter available to victims of domestic violence, and the prospect of uprooting children once again from schools and communities to move to yet another temporary space, if housing has not been found by the end of their allowable stay, would quickly burn out even the most optimistic and energized person. It makes little sense economically, educationally and emotionally to create a tribe of displaced survivors, parents and children, whose safety cannot be advanced with a move from emergency shelter into permanent safe housing .

Every means necessary should be pursued to increase the availability of housing, assure solid, but broader criteria for the domestic violence priority for NYCHA Public Housing and Section 8, and to establish a rapid method of processing housing applications. Only after safe, permanent housing is secured can survivors of domestic violence devote the time and energy to healing from the trauma they have experienced, and wholeheartedly pursue employment using the talents and skills they have not had the opportunity to use and/or nourish while living under abuse and trauma. We are headed in the right direction but have not yet arrived at a system that responds appropriately and quickly to create permanency and safety. This can be done.



Yisroel Schulman, Esq.
President & Attorney-in-Charge

Access to Public Housing for Victims of Domestic Violence June 11, 2009

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak about public housing issues impacting domestic violence victims in NYC. My name is Lisa Rivera and I am the associate director of the Matrimonial and Family Law Unit at the New York Legal Assistance Group, a not for profit civil legal services organization where we represent domestic violence victims in a wide variety of cases including family law, housing, public benefits, and immigration. Also, with me is Shari Morris a staff attorney from our housing project, who is appearing today on behalf of Kamilla Sjodin, who is unable to attend.

We are here today to urge the City Council to change the necessary documentation criteria for public housing applications, to increase the stay in either emergency or Tier II shelters for domestic violence victims and ask for an increase in transitional housing.

When thinking of domestic violence (DV), many think of the physical and emotional abuse that the abuser inflicts. Victims of domestic violence, however, also face additional obstacles. They may never have had control of their own finances, or were prevented from working, may have few employment options after leaving their abusers, been prevented from going to school, have no child care, been isolated from friends and family and may not speak English. These realities affect their ability to navigate the system. Victims of DV face a higher risk of abuse at separation. This makes temporary and permanent housing for DV victims crucial. Despite the dire need for permanent housing, there are many obstacles ranging from enormous delays in the application process to onerous requirements to document their abuse.

According to New Destiny Housing Corporation (who will be testifying today), only 18% of domestic violence survivors leave emergency shelters for permanent housing. Without permanent housing these victims become trapped and must choose between continued violence or homelessness. Because *not enough* viable options for permanent housing exist, victims will be forced to make difficult decisions. Over half of homeless mothers in New York City have a history of domestic violence (Coalition for the Homeless, May 2003). This simply cannot continue.

Currently New York City offers beds in domestic violence shelters for victims, who, under Local Law 43, cannot be denied space in a shelter due to lack of documentary evidence. (New York City Charter, Code, Amendments & Rules, New York City Local Laws, Local Law No. 43, 2002, In. 120-A). Unlike for Section 8 or Public Housing, lack of a police report or Order of Protection will not preclude a domestic violence victim from obtaining a place in a New

York City shelter. Only when the victim attempts to leave the shelter in order to secure permanent housing are these requirements imposed.

This is counterintuitive. If these documents were not required (for good reason) when she entered the shelter, it seems unlikely that the passage of time would make the documents more accessible given that she has left her home with little belongings and cut off ties to her previous life to remain safe from her abuser. As a result, better criteria for enabling the Housing Authority to identify DV victims for permanent housing applications must be developed.

Documentation requirements are an understandable effort by NYCHA to give housing to the most needy DV victims, but these requirements do not achieve that goal. Domestic violence victims are required to present fewer documents than a regular applicant when applying for Public Housing or Section 8 housing. These accommodations, however, do not ameliorate the extremely onerous application process.

They are mandated to produce police reports, court documents, hospital records, and advocacy letters. As we know, they must present *two* "primary" documents in addition to an advocacy letter. Only victims of "serious felonies" are asked to submit one primary document (*police report/family court order/order of protection/hospital inpatient record/Court Dispute Referral Center Letter/Letter from a DA or NYPD Detective*) and one advocacy letter. However, if a felony was committed it's likely the victim would have more documents available to them as opposed to the "non-felony" case.

Therefore, victims of domestic violence are expected not only to understand which documents are required to be presented with their application, but they also must gather these documents from various sources, or worse, retrieve them directly from the home or neighborhood they may have shared with the abuser. Worse still, these documents can be sophisticated in nature, making locating and retrieving them even more burdensome.

The biggest problem with the current required documents is that many domestic violence victims never step foot inside a police precinct, a hospital, or a court room. They are ashamed, embarrassed, terrified of retaliation or prevented by their abuser from seeking help. Moreover, the current criteria assumes that the victim will report abuse *before* she has even fled for her safety, even though we know that simply is not the case for many victims. It is sometimes simply not safe to do so. Therefore, even with the so-called accommodations set forth above, permanent housing still eludes countless domestic violence victims.

Consequently, we are recommending a change in the application process for domestic violence victims and urge the City Council to adopt the use of a victim statement as proof that abuse exists. Federal programs already include such provisions. For example, even the United States Citizen and Immigration Service has no required set of documents needed in applications for victims seeking status under the Violence Against Women Act. While USCIS provides a list of example documents, most of the documents are "suggested" and all are not required as proof. This list includes, but is not limited to, documents already asked for by the Housing Authority. However, USCIS does ask for a victim statement that outlines the abuse she faced and this alone can be sufficient proof for immigration purposes. Therefore, we ask that you adopt the victim statement as proof along with the advocacy letter.

This need for flexibility in documentation criteria reflects the realities of the victims I work with. Most importantly, this will recognize the fact that many victims don't report abuse until they feel safe to do so. For many, this is when they seek temporary housing in the shelter system.

We are also joining with others in recommending extending the maximum stay for domestic violence victims in emergency and Tier II shelter system.

According to NYCHA, as of April 30, 2009, there were 131,077 families on the waiting list for Conventional Public Housing (*including 14,107 who were in the certification process*) and 127,825 families on the waiting list for a Section 8 voucher (*including 2,800 who were in the certification process*). Additionally, it is virtually impossible to establish an average waiting time for an applicant applying for a Section 8 voucher and Public Housing and the process could take anywhere from a few months to several years for approval. (NYCHA Fact Sheet)

A domestic violence victim is only able to apply for permanent housing through New York City after 42 days in the emergency shelter, although sometimes victims are allowed to apply after only 21 days. (Schwartz & Stapel). Domestic violence victims are allowed a maximum of 135 days in emergency shelter.

As a result of lengthy approval delays, many victims reach their maximum stay without a resolution to their housing needs. Consequently, victims are forced to start the process again by applying for shelter with the Department of Homeless Services, turn to the streets for shelter, or endanger their lives because they have no choice but to return to their abuser. Given the knowledge the City has about the delays domestic violence victims face for approval, the expectation that permanent housing would be available after only 135 days with cannot possibly be seen as reasonable. Therefore, the time for stays in shelter must be extended to reflect reality and a plan should be created to accelerate the process because of the risks discussed earlier.

Similarly, there are times in which a domestic violence victim is already residing in public housing and must go to a shelter in order to escape her abuser. Though it is possible to transfer to different housing in cases where there is domestic violence, the wait time for such a transfer may be lengthy. During the waiting period, it is possible that the victim will not only have to pay rent for the apartment from which she fled, but also pay rent to the shelter. This certainly seems inequitable and creates yet another hardship.

Lastly, we would be remiss in not bringing forward the problems with section 8 vouchers that DV victims face. Landlords frequently turn away women who have orders of protections or other indications of domestic violence (National Coalition Against DV (2003)). Furthermore, despite Local Law 10's prohibition against discriminating against a prospective tenant because of his or her source of income, many landlords are turning away those that have a section 8 voucher. This is particularly problematic for DV victims since the vouchers are likely the only way they can afford to escape their abusers and move on with their lives. While denial of the vouchers are clearly in violation of Local Law 10, the remedy available in cases like this do not necessarily help the potential tenant as one of the only ways to force the landlord to accept the

voucher is to commence a lawsuit against them. However, this then creates a difficult living situation for the tenant, who only got into the apartment by suing the landlord -- thus ostensibly creating a new hurdle in the victim's quest for safety.

Thank you.

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Name: Neola Cason (PLEASE PRINT)

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I represent: HELP USA

Address: 5 Hanover Square

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Name: Silvia Dutchevici (PLEASE PRINT)

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I represent: Sanctuary For Families

Address: PO Box 1406 NY NY 10268

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Name: Patrice C Queen (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Voices of Women Organizing

Address: Project

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Name: CLAIRE McCUE
Address: 36 RICHMOND TERRACE, ST, NY 10301
I represent: STATEN ISLAND LEGAL SERVICES
Address: SAME AS ABOVE

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Name: Catherine Trapani
Address: 1140 Broadway Ste 1002 NY, NY 10001
I represent: New Destiny Housing
Address: same as above

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CYNTHIA DAWSON
Address: 25 Chapel Street Suite 904
I represent: Center Against Domestic Violence
Address: 141 31st St BKN

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Name: JOSEPH A. GAMBEN

Address: 121 WILSON ST. APT. 4F

I represent: LONG TIME RESIDENT

Address: PUBLIC HOUSING

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(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: Lisa Rivera & Shari Harris

Address: 450 West 33rd St NY NY 10001

I represent: New York Legal Assistance Group

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: Nathaniel Fields

Address: _____

I represent: Safe Horizon

Address: 2 Lafayette NY NY 10007

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Robert J Desir

Address: 199 Water Street 3rd floor New York NY 10038

I represent: Legal Aid Society

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CECILE NOEL

Address: _____

I represent: HRA

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: TINA LAM

Address: _____

I represent: NYCHA

Address: _____

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Name: Lori Rodriguez (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 2472 St Raymond Avenue

I represent: ~~St Raymond Avenue~~

Address: _____

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Name: Nathaniel C. Fields (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Legislative Services Zone C - Staten Island

Address: 2 Lafayette NY NY 10007

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Name: NORA Reissig - LAZZARO (PLEASE PRINT)

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I represent: NYCTA

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Name: MARGARITA LOPEZ, COMMISSIONER

Address: _____

I represent: NYCHA

Address: _____

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Name: STEPHEN CORSON

Address: 1 CENTRE ST 19TH FLOOR

I represent: SCOTT STRINGER - MANHATTAN BP

Address: SAME

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Name: SANUEW BERSHACK

Address: _____

I represent: V.I.P

Address: PO BOX 1764 BX, NY 10451

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Name: RYAN A BAILEY (PLEASE PRINT)
Address: PO BOX 1764 BRONX NY 10451
I represent: Myself & Violence Intervention
Address: PO BOX 1764 BRONX NY 10451

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Date: 6/11/09

Name: S. ONICA (PLEASE PRINT)
Address: 104-19 125 STREET, RICHMOND HILL, NY 11419
I represent: VOW / OTHER (NYSD / OTHER) FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER
Address: _____

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Name: Bonnie Greenwich (PLEASE PRINT)
Address: 305 7th Ave, NYC, NY
I represent: Good Shepherd Services - Safe Homes Project
Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Raselene Oliveira

Address: _____

I represent: Cidadao Global

Address: 47-32 32nd Place, LIC, 11225

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jennifer G. L.

Address: P.O. Box 804 New York, NY 10037

I represent: Urban Women's Project

Address: P.O. Box 804 New York, NY 10037

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elena Lopez

Address: 25 Chapel Street 904

I represent: Center Against D.V.

Address: 25 Chapel Street

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Name: Rosalind Pasley
Address: Homeless / 40 Ann St. Manh. NY 10038
Coalition for the Homeless

I represent: VOUS

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shari Morris
Address: 450 W 33rd St NY, NY 10001

I represent: NEW YORK Legal Assistance Group

Address: _____

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