

Securing

a safe place to live may be one of the most important steps you take to protect yourself and your children from domestic violence.

You may want to stay in your current housing. You may want to move. What options you have will depend on your personal situation, what type of housing you live in now, and your income. In all cases, you should:

- ☛ Always ask a judge to include in a restraining order that your abuser cannot interfere with your housing; and
- ☛ Get assistance. Housing rules can be confusing. Advocates familiar with housing laws and programs can be helpful.

If You Live in Public Housing

- ☐ If you want to stay in your apartment, make sure you are listed on your lease as the **head of household**. Also make sure that the abuser is removed from the lease as a member of the household.
- ☐ If your income has gone down because the abuser is no longer contributing income or you can no longer work, you should be entitled to a **rent reduction**. Ask the housing authority to lower your rent.
- ☐ If you want to transfer to another apartment within your development or to another development in the community, you can request a **transfer**. Transfer policies vary from development to development. If you are denied a transfer you have a right to challenge this denial.
- ☐ If you want to move out of public housing or out of the community, you can apply for a Section 8 voucher or to another community's public housing. Make sure that you request **priority**. Many housing authorities give priority to victims of domestic violence or those who must relocate to avoid reprisal.

If You Live in Privately Owned Subsidized Housing

- ☐ If you want to stay in your apartment, make sure you are listed on your lease as the **head of household**. Also make sure that the abuser is removed from the lease as a member of the household.
- ☐ If your rent is based on a percentage of your income and your income has gone down, you may be entitled to a **rent decrease**.
- ☐ If you live in a market-rate apartment in a development funded by the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) and your income goes down, you can apply for a subsidized apartment within that development. To find out whether your development is funded by MHFA, call (617) 854-1000.
- ☐ If you want to **transfer** to another subsidized apartment in another city or town, you will need the help of an advocate or housing search worker.
- ☐ You can apply for a Section 8 voucher at a local housing authority. Make sure that you request **priority**. Many housing authorities give priority to victims of domestic violence or those who must relocate to avoid reprisal.

Whom to Call for Help

Casa Myrna Vazquez, Inc.
24-Hour Hotline Networks
for Women's Safety
1-800-992-2600

Legal Advocacy and
Resource Center (LARC)
1-617-742-9179 (Boston area)
1-800-342-5297

Local Legal Services Office
Call LARC for phone numbers
1-800-342-5297

There are many different types of programs that fund privately owned subsidized housing, each with different rules. **These guidelines are only general guidelines.**

If You Have a Section 8 Voucher or Certificate or MRVP Voucher

- If your income has gone down because the abuser is not contributing income or you can no longer work, you should be entitled to a **rent decrease**. Ask the agency that gave you the voucher to adjust your rent.
- If you are not listed as the **head of household on your voucher**, ask the agency that gave you the voucher to do this. Under their family break-up policy, just because an abuser is listed as the head of household does not mean he keeps the voucher. Also ask that the abuser no longer be listed as a member of the household.
- If you need to leave your apartment within the **first year of a tenancy or before the lease term is over**, you can only break your lease agreement with your landlord's permission. Contact the landlord and the housing agency about ending the lease.
- If you have lived in an apartment for **over a year**, you do not need permission to move. Ask the agency that gave you a voucher for a new one. Then give the landlord and the agency **written notice** that you are leaving and pay the last month's rent. Your lease says how much notice you must give. Once you get a voucher, you only have 120 days to find a new apartment.
- If you are looking for a new apartment, you may be eligible for a short-term emergency stay at a domestic violence shelter. If you are in a shelter and cannot search until you complete counseling or therapy, ask the housing agency to **suspend** your Section 8 voucher until you start your housing search.

If You Live in Private Unaffordable Housing

- You can apply for public housing or a Section 8 voucher at local housing agencies.
- You can apply at privately owned subsidized housing developments through their management companies.
- While waiting lists are long for public, Section 8, and subsidized housing, there may be a **priority** given to people facing domestic violence. Priorities are

different at each housing authority, but may include:

- **Domestic violence priority:**
You are or will soon be homeless due to recent or continuing abuse. The abuser must have been a member of your household and lived with you.
- **Relocation to avoid reprisal priority:**
You must obtain a letter from a law enforcement official stating that you must relocate for your safety.
- For state public housing, there may be a **priority** for people who face domestic violence under the **Housing Authority's Emergency Case Plan**. If you apply, ask for a copy of the housing authority's plan.
- Forms of proof for a domestic violence priority include: 209A orders, police reports, and letters from witnesses, doctors, domestic violence advocates, clergy, police, law enforcement officials, or landlords. No one particular form is required. These are examples.

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Housing Checklist for Victims of Domestic Violence

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