

ISSUE

The lack of housing options is one of the greatest barriers domestic violence victims face in trying to break free from abuse. Victims and their children are too often losing their housing as a result of domestic violence, and/or are forced to endure continued abuse because of the lack of safe and affordable alternative housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Support Legislation to Create Additional Housing Options, Including the Establishment of a State Housing Trust Fund**
- **Oppose Legislation That Would Curb Tenants' Rights in the Eviction Process**
- **Support Additional Funding for Domestic Violence Programs to Meet Victims' Need for Emergency and Transitional Housing**

BACKGROUND**Lack of Housing Options Traps Victims, Causes Homelessness and Eviction**

While the intersection between housing and domestic violence may not be obvious, in fact the need for increased housing resources is an issue of paramount importance among domestic violence victims and their advocates.

There is a severe shortage of affordable housing for low-income individuals and families.

- According to a 2003 federal report, **over five million households have “worst case” housing needs:** living in substandard housing, doubled-up, or paying over one-half of their income for rent.⁵⁹ Needless to say, the crisis in the housing market has grown even more acute in recent years.
- Federal **housing assistance programs**, including public housing, housing subsidy programs, transitional and supportive housing, and emergency shelter programs, are all under-funded at levels nowhere near the rapidly growing need. **Years-long waiting lists are the norm.**

For domestic violence victims, the general lack of affordable housing means that they are trapped living with or near their abusers because they simply cannot afford to move away.⁶⁰

- In addition to the physical violence, abusive partners frequently engage in **economic abuse designed to control their victims and keep them dependent and unable to leave.**
 - ◆ Abusers' tactics include dominance over shared finances and interfering with victims' employment so that they remain economically dependent: abusers may forbid victims from working, or sabotage their employment by stalking and harassing victims at work.
- **With little or no income, victims' housing is thus jeopardized, and they simply cannot afford to break free.**

59 Office of Policy Development and Research Information Service, U.S. Dep't of Housing and Urban Development, *Trends in Worst Case Needs for Housing, 1978- 1999, Plus Update on Worst Case Needs in 2001* xix (2003), available at www.huduser.org/publications/pdf/trends.pdf.

60 See Nat'l Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, *Some Facts on Homelessness, Housing, and Violence Against Women*, available at www.nlchp.org/content/pubs/Some%20Facts%20on%20Homeless%20and%20DV.pdf.

POLICY PRIORITY

HOUSING

Many low-income battered women specifically cite the fear of homelessness as the reason for remaining with their abuser⁶¹ – and this fear is well-founded.

- Between **22% and 57%** of homeless women report that **domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness.**⁶²
- 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.**⁶³
- 38% of domestic violence victims become homeless at some point in their lives.⁶⁴

Domestic violence is also a common cause of eviction, rendering victims homeless as a consequence of being abused.

- Abusers may break doors and windows and otherwise **damage the property during an assault.**
- **Repeat calls to the police** by the victim or neighbors may trigger eviction or non-renewal of the lease.
- **Local “nuisance” ordinances** contribute to eviction of domestic violence victims by requiring landlords to evict **without requiring an exception for victims of the conduct as opposed to perpetrators** who are the true cause of the nuisance.

In these ways and more, domestic violence victims are forced to bear the consequences of abusers' conduct, consequences which too often cause them to lose their homes.

As long-term housing options become scarcer and are priced further out of reach, **battered women are staying longer in emergency domestic violence shelters.** As a result, shelters are frequently full and must turn families away.

- The National Census of Domestic Violence Services found that **in one 24-hour period, 4,676 requests for emergency shelter and transitional housing went unmet due to lack of resources.**⁶⁵
- In Pennsylvania in particular, on a single day, 1,071 domestic violence victims found refuge in emergency shelters or transitional housing provided by local domestic violence programs – yet 209 requests for services were unmet due to lack of resources or capacity.
- The average stay at an emergency homeless shelter is 60 days, while the **average length of time it takes a homeless family to secure housing is 6-10 months.**⁶⁶

In sum, housing is one of the greatest needs domestic violence victims have. The lack of housing resources mean that **victims are caught in a dangerous Catch-22 – forced to choose between staying in abusive homes or fleeing to a life of homelessness.**

61 N. Stern, “Housing, Homelessness, and Domestic Violence” in *The Impact of Domestic Violence on Your Legal Practice: A Lawyer's Handbook* (Amer. Bar Ass'n Commission on Domestic Violence, eds., 2d ed. 2004).

62 Wilder Research Center, *Homeless in Minnesota* 2003 22 (2004); Center for Impact Research, *Pathways to and from Homelessness: Women and Children in Chicago Shelters* 3 (2004); Nat'l Center on Family Homelessness & Health Care for the Homeless Clinicians' Network, *Social Supports for Homeless Mothers* 14, 26 (2003); Inst. for Children & Poverty, *The Hidden Migration: Why New York City Shelters Are Overflowing with Families* (2004); Homes for the Homeless & Inst. for Children & Poverty, *Ten Cities 1997-1998: A Snapshot of Family Homelessness Across America* 3 (1998); Virginia Coalition for the Homeless, *1995 Shelter Provider Survey* (1995) (out of print), cited in Nat'l Coalition for the Homeless, *Domestic Violence and Homelessness: NCH Fact Sheet #8* (1999).

63 A. Browne & S. Bassuk, “Intimate Violence in the Lives of Homeless and Poor Housed Women: Prevalence and Patterns in an Ethnically Diverse Sample,” 67(2) *Amer. Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 261-78 (1997); A. Browne, “Responding to the Needs of Low Income and Homeless Women Who are Survivors of Family Violence,” 53(2) *Journal of Amer. Medical Ass'n*, 57-64 (1998).

64 C.K. Baker, S.L. Cook, & F.H. Norris, “Domestic Violence and Housing Problems: A Contextual Analysis of Women's Help-seeking, Received Informal Support, and Formal System Response,” 9(7) *Violence Against Women* 754-83 (2003).

65 National Network to End Domestic Violence, “Domestic Violence Counts Census” (2007).

66 Lifting the Voices of Homeless Women, Roofless Women's Action Research Mobilization, Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development, 1997.

PCADV Housing Initiatives

In response to the grave need for increased housing resources and protections of victims' housing rights, the PCADV has established several policy priorities and other initiatives.

- The PCADV **works with our allies** in legal services and with the Housing Alliance on legislation that will **promote development of housing resources** for vulnerable populations, and that will **protect tenants rights**.
 - ◆ **We support pending legislation to establish a state housing trust fund.** The current legislation is HB 2600, and would make a critical investment in Pennsylvania's housing infrastructure by building and rehabilitating homes, while ensuring this investment pays off for those most in need. Domestic violence victims are certainly within that group, and will benefit significantly from this legislation.
 - ◆ **We oppose legislation that would curb tenants' rights in the eviction process,** such as the repeated proposals to accelerate the eviction process (HB 235, and by amendment to HB 1684). Given that domestic violence is a common cause of eviction and consequent homelessness, it is critical that victims' safety and interests be protected through the Landlord-Tenant Act.
- The PCADV is developing legislation that will prohibit housing discrimination against domestic violence victims.
 - ◆ Dozens of states have enacted such protections, and we are currently researching the effectiveness of the various models available.
 - ◆ We expect to offer proposed legislation in the 2009-10 legislative session.
- The PCADV provides **technical assistance** to our 61 member programs, allied organizations, policy-makers, and others **concerning the housing rights of domestic violence victims**.
 - ◆ For example, the federal Violence Against Women Act was amended in 2005 to prohibit discrimination against victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking in federal public housing programs administered by HUD. These changes require technical assistance in order to implement and enforce, and we have developed specific guidance to respond to such inquiries.
- Our 61 community-based programs **will continue to provide emergency shelter and transitional housing for victims and their children**.
 - ◆ However, programs' ability to meet the growing need for housing resources has been **severely curtailed by the lack of adequate funding**.
 - ◆ **Increasing funding for domestic violence services is a critical element of addressing victims' housing needs.**