

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

A federal law that went into effect in 2013 protects individuals who are victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. The name of the law is the Violence against Women Act, or “VAWA.” This notice explains your rights under VAWA.

Protections for Victims

If you are eligible for a Section 8 voucher, the housing authority cannot deny you rental assistance solely because you are a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking.

If you are the victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking, you cannot be terminated from the Section 8 program or evicted based on acts or threats of violence committed against you. Also, criminal acts directly related to the domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking that are caused by a member of your household or a guest can't be the reason for evicting you or terminating your rental assistance if you were the victim of the abuse.

Reasons You Can Be Evicted

You can be evicted and your rental assistance can be terminated if the housing authority or your landlord can show there is an *actual* and *imminent* (immediate) threat to other tenants or employees at the property if you remain in your housing. Also, you can be evicted and your rental assistance can be terminated for serious or repeated lease violations that are not related to the domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking committed against you. The housing authority and your landlord cannot hold you to a more demanding set of rules than it applies to tenants who are not victims.

Removing the Abuser from the Household

Your landlord may split the lease to evict a tenant who has committed criminal acts of violence against family members or others, while allowing the victim and other household members to stay in the assisted unit. Also, the housing authority can terminate the abuser's Section 8 rental assistance while allowing you to continue to receive assistance. If the landlord or housing authority chooses to remove the abuser, it may not take away the remaining tenants' rights to the unit or otherwise punish the remaining tenants. In removing the abuser from the household, your landlord must follow federal, state, and local eviction procedures.

Moving to Protect Your Safety

The housing authority may permit you to move and still keep your rental assistance, even if your current lease has not yet expired. The housing authority may require that you be current on your rent or other obligations in the housing choice voucher program. The housing authority may ask you to provide proof that you are moving because of incidences of abuse.

Proving That You Are a Victim of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, or Stalking

The housing authority and your landlord can ask you to prove or “certify” that you are a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking. The housing authority or your landlord must give you at least 14 business days (i.e., Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays do not count) to provide this proof. The housing authority and your landlord are free to extend the deadline. There are three ways you can prove that you are a victim:

- Complete the certification form given to you by the housing authority or your landlord. The form will ask for your name, the name of your abuser, the abuser’s relationship to you, the date, time, and location of the incident of violence, and a description of the violence. You are only required to provide the name of the abuser if it is safe to provide and you know their name.
- Provide a statement from a victim service provider, attorney, or medical professional who has helped you address incidents of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking. The professional must state that he or she believes that the incidents of abuse are real. Both you and the professional must sign the statement, and both of you must state that you are signing “under penalty of perjury.”
- Provide a police or court record, such as a protective order.

If you fail to provide one of these documents within the required time, the landlord may evict you, and the housing authority may terminate your rental assistance.

Confidentiality

The housing authority and your landlord must keep confidential any information you provide about the violence against you, unless:

- You give written permission to the housing authority or your landlord to release the information.
- Your landlord needs to use the information in an eviction proceeding, such as to evict your abuser.
- A law requires the housing authority or your landlord to release the information.

If release of the information would put your safety at risk, you should inform the housing authority and your landlord.

VAWA and Other Laws

VAWA does not limit the Housing Authority’s or your landlord’s duty to honor court orders about access to or control of the property. This includes orders issued to protect a victim and orders dividing property among household members in cases where a family breaks up.

VAWA does not replace any federal, state, or local law that provides greater protection for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking.

For Additional Information

If you have any questions regarding VAWA, please contact Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services at 651-222-5863.

For help and advice on escaping an abusive relationship, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).

Definitions

For purposes of determining whether a tenant may be covered by VAWA, the following list of definitions applies:

VAWA defines *domestic violence* to include felony or misdemeanor crimes of violence committed by any of the following:

- A current or former spouse of the victim
- A person with whom the victim shares a child in common
- A person who is cohabitating with or has cohabitated with the victim as a spouse
- A person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction receiving grant monies
- Any other person against an adult or youth victim who is protected from that person's acts under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction

VAWA defines *dating violence* as violence committed by a person (1) who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim AND (2) where the existence of such a relationship shall be determined based on a consideration of the following factors:

- The length of the relationship
- The type of relationship
- The frequency of interaction between the persons involved in the relationship

VAWA defines *stalking* as (A)(i) to follow, pursue, or repeatedly commit acts with the intent to kill, injure, harass, or intimidate another person OR (ii) to place under surveillance with the intent to kill, injure, harass, or intimidate another person AND (B) in the course of, or as a result of, such following, pursuit, surveillance, or repeatedly committed acts, to place a person in reasonable fear of the death of, or serious bodily injury to, or to cause substantial emotional harm to (i) that person, (ii) a member of the immediate family of that person, or (iii) the spouse or intimate partner of that person.

VAWA defines *sexual assault* as "any nonconsensual sexual act proscribed by Federal, tribal, or State law, including when the victim lacks the capacity to consent" (42 U.S.C. 13925(a)).

CERTIFICATION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, DATING VIOLENCE, OR STALKING

**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Public and Indian Housing**

OMB Approval No. 2577-0249

Exp. (11/30/2010)

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response. This includes the time for collecting, reviewing, and reporting the data. Information provided is to be used by PHAs and Section 8 owners or managers to request a tenant to certify that the individual is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking. The information is subject to the confidentiality requirements of the HUD Reform Legislation. This agency may not collect this information, and you are not required to complete this form unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Purpose of Form: The Violence Against Women and Justice Department Reauthorization Act of 2005 protects qualified tenants and family members of tenants who are victims of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking from being evicted or terminated from housing assistance based on acts of such violence against them.

Use of Form: A family member must complete and submit this certification, or the information that may be provided in lieu of the certification, within 14 business days of receiving the written request for this certification by the PHA, owner or manager. The certification or alternate documentation must be returned to the person and address specified in the written request for the certification. If the family member has not provided the requested certification or the information that may be provided in lieu of the certification by the 14th business day or any extension of the date provided by the PHA, manager and owner, none of the protections afforded to victims of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking (collectively "domestic violence") under the Section 8 or public housing programs apply.

Note that a family member may provide, in lieu of this certification (or in addition to it):

- (1) A Federal, State, tribal, territorial, or local police or court record; or
- (2) Documentation signed by an employee, agent or volunteer of a victim service provider, an attorney or a medical professional, from whom the victim has sought assistance in addressing domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, or the effects of abuse, in which the professional attest under penalty of perjury (28 U.S.C. 1746) to the professional's belief that the incident or incidents in question are bona fide incidents of abuse, and the victim of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking has signed or attested to the documentation.

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

Date Written Request Received By Family Member: _____

Name of the Victim of Domestic Violence: _____

Name(s) of other family members listed on the lease _____

Name of the abuser: _____

Relationship to Victim: _____

Date the incident of domestic violence occurred: _____

Time: _____

Location of Incident: _____

Name of victim: _____

Description of Incident:

[INSERT TEXT LINES HERE]

I hereby certify that the information that I have provided is true and correct and I believe that, based on the information I have provided, that I am a victim of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking and that the incident(s) in question are bona fide incidents of such actual or threatened abuse. I acknowledge that submission of false information relating to program eligibility is a basis for termination of assistance or eviction.

Signature _____ Executed on (Date) _____

All information provided to a PHA, owner or manager relating to the incident(s) of domestic violence, including the fact that an individual is a victim of domestic violence shall be retained in confidence by an owner and shall neither be entered into any shared database nor provided to any related entity, except to the extent that such disclosure is (i) requested or consented to by the individual in writing; (ii) required for use in an eviction proceeding or termination of assistance; or (iii) otherwise required by applicable law.