

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Policy

Title VI of the VAWA adds a new housing provision that establishes several categories of protected individuals. Under the law victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking are granted protections and cannot be denied or terminated from housing or housing assistance because of activity that is directly related to domestic violence. 2005 VAWA Pub. L. 109-162; Stat. 2960 signed into law on January 5, 2006 and codified at 42 U.S.C. §1437d(l) and 1435f(d), (0) & 1 and (u)

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to reduce domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking and to prevent homelessness by:

- (a) protecting the safety of victims;
- (b) creating long-term housing solutions for victims;
- (c) building collaborations among victim service providers; and
- (d) assisting PCHA to respond appropriately to the violence while maintaining a safe environment for PCHA, employees, tenants, applicants, program participants and others.

The policy will assist the Pike County Housing Authority (PCHA) in providing rights under the Violence Against Women Act to its applicants, public housing residents, and other program participants.

This Policy is incorporated into PCHA's "Admission and Continued Occupancy Policy" and applies to all PCHA housing programs.

2.0 Definitions

The definitions in this Section apply only to this Policy.

- 2.1 **Confidentiality:** Means that PCHA will not enter information provided to PCHA by a victim alleging domestic violence into a shared database or provide this information to any related entity except as stated in 3.4
- 2.2 **Dating Violence:** Violence committed by a person (a) who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim; and (b) where the existence of such relationship shall be determined based on a consideration of the following factors: (i) the length of the relationship; (ii) the type of relationship; (iii) the frequency of interaction between the persons involved in the relationship. 42 U.S.C. §1437d (u)(3)(A), § 13925.

- 2.3 **Domestic Violence:** Felony or misdemeanor crimes of violence committed by a current or former spouse of the victim, committed by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, committed by a person who is cohabitating with or has cohabitated with the victim as a spouse, committed by a person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of Illinois, or committed by 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 Illinois. 42 U.S.C. §1437d(u)(3)(B), § 13925.
- 2.4 **Immediate Family Member:** A spouse, parent, brother or sister, or child of a victim or an individual to whom the victim stands *in loco parentis*; or any other person living in the household of the victim and related to the victim by blood or marriage. 42 U.S.C. § 1437d(u)(3)(D), § 13925.
- 2.5 **Perpetrator:** A person who commits an act of domestic violence, dating domestic violence or stalking against a victim.
- 2.6 **Stalking:** (a) to follow, pursue or repeatedly commit acts with the intent to kill, injure, harass or intimidate the victim; (b) to place under surveillance with the intent to kill, injure, harass or intimidate the victim; (c) in the course of, or as a result of such following, pursuit, surveillance, or repeatedly committed acts, to place the victim in reasonable fear of the death of, or serious bodily injury to the victim; or (d) to cause substantial emotional harm to the victim, a member of the immediate family of the victim or the spouse or intimate partner of the victim. 42 U.S.C. §1437d(u)(3)(C), § 13925.
- 2.7 **Bona Fide Claim:** A *bonafide* claim of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking must include incidents that meet the terms and conditions in the above definitions.
- 2.8 **Victim:** Is a person who is the victim of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking under this Policy and who has timely and completely completed the certification under 3.2 and 3.3 or as requested by PCHA.

3.0 Certification and Confidentiality

3.1 Failure to Provide Certification Under 3.2 and 3.3

The person claiming protection under VAWA shall provide complete and accurate certifications to PCHA, owner or manager within 14 business days after the party requests in writing that the person completes the certifications. If the person does not provide a complete and accurate certification within the 14 business days, PCHA, owner or manager may take action to deny or terminate participation or tenancy. 42 U.S.C. §14371 (5) & (6); 42 U.S.C. § 1437F(c)(9); 42 U.S.C. §1437f(d)(l)(B)(ii)&(iii); 42 U.S.C. §1437f(o)(7)(C)&(D); or 42 U.S.C. §1437f(o)(20) or for other good cause.

3.2 HUD Approved Certification

For each incident that a person is claiming as abuse, the person shall certify to PCHA, owner or manager their victim status by completing a HUD approved certification form. The person shall certify the date, time and description of the incidents, that the incidents are *bonafide* incidents of actual or threatened abuses and meet the requirements of VAWA and this Policy. The person shall provide information to identify the perpetrator including but not limited to the name and, if known, all alias names, date of birth, address, contact information such as postal, e-mail or internet address, telephone or facsimile number or other identification.

3.3 Confirmation of Certification

A person who is claiming victim status shall provide to PCHA, an owner or manager: (a) documentation signed by the victim and 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 the abuse, in which the professional attests under penalty of perjury (28 U.S.C. §1746) the professional's belief that the incident(s) in question are *bonafide* incidents of abuse; or (b) a federal, state, tribal, territorial, local police or court record.

3.4 Confidentiality

PCHA, the owner and managers shall keep all information provided to PCHA under this Section confidential. PCHA, owner and manager shall not enter the information into a shared database or provide to any related entity except to the extent that:

- (a) the victim request or consents to the disclosure in writing;
- (b) the disclosure is required for eviction from public housing under 42 U.S.C. §1437 l(5)&(6)(See Section 4 in this Policy)

4.0 Appropriate Basis for Denial of Admission, Assistance or Tenancy

- 4.1 PCHA shall not deny participation or admission to a program on the basis of a person's abuse status, if the person otherwise qualifies for admission of assistance.
- 4.2 An incident or incidents of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking will not be a serious or repeated violation of the lease by the victim and shall not be good cause for denying to a victim admission to a program, terminating occupancy rights, or evicting a tenant.

- 4.3 Criminal activity directly related to domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking engaged in by a member of a tenant's household or any guest or other person under the tenant's control shall not be cause for termination of assistance, tenancy, or occupancy rights if the tenant or an immediate member of the tenant's family is the victim of that domestic violence, dating violence or stalking.
- 4.4 Notwithstanding Sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.2, PCHA, an owner or manager may bifurcate a lease to evict, remove or terminate assistance to any individual who is a tenant or lawful occupant and who engages in criminal acts of physical violence against family members or others without evicting, removing, terminating assistance to or otherwise penalizing the victim of the violence who is also a tenant or lawful occupant. 42 U.S.C. §1437d(l)(6)(B)
- 4.5 Nothing in Sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 shall limit the authority of PCHA, an owner or manager, when notified, to honor court orders addressing rights of access to or control of the property, including civil protection orders issued to protect the victim and issued to address the distribution or possession of property among the household members when the family breaks up.
- 4.6 Nothing in Sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 limits PCHA, an owner or manager's authority to evict or terminate assistance to any tenant for any violation of lease not premised on the act or acts of violence against the tenant or a member of the tenant's household. However PCHA, owner or manager may not hold a victim to a more demanding standard.
- 4.7 Nothing in Sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 limits PCHA, an owner or manager's authority to evict or terminate assistance, or deny admission to a program if the PCHA, owner or manager can show an actual and imminent threat to other tenants, neighbors, guests, their employees, persons providing service to the property or others if the tenant family is not evicted or terminated from assistance or denied admission.
- 4.8 Nothing in Sections 4.1, 4.2, or 4.3 limits PCHA, an owner or manager's authority to deny admission, terminate assistance or evict a person who engages in criminal acts including but not limited to acts of physical violence or stalking against family members or others.

4.9 Actions Against a Perpetrator

The PCHA may evict, terminate assistance, deny admission to a program or trespass a perpetrator from its property under this Policy. The victim shall take action to control or prevent the domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking. The action may include but is not limited to: (a) obtaining and enforcing a restraining or no contact order or order for protection against the perpetrator; (b) obtaining and enforcing a trespass against the perpetrator; (c) enforcing PCHA or law enforcement's trespass of the perpetrator; (d) preventing the delivery of the perpetrator's mail to the victim's unit; (e) providing identifying information listed in 3.2; and (f) other reasonable measures.

5.0 PCHA Right to Terminate Housing and Housing Assistance Under this Policy

- 5.1 Nothing in this Policy will restrict the PCHA, owner or manager's right to terminate tenancy for lease violations by a resident who claims VAWA as a defense if it is determined by the PCHA, owner or manager that such a claim is false.
- 5.2 Nothing in this Policy will restrict the PCHA right to terminate tenancy if the victim tenant (a) allows a perpetrator to violate a court order relating to the act or acts of violence; or (b) if the victim tenant allows a perpetrator who has been barred from PCHA property to come onto PCHA property including but not limited to the victim's unit or any other area under their control; or (c) if the victim tenant fails to cooperate with an established safety strategy as designed by a local victim support service provider (see 7.2).
- 5.3 Nothing in this Policy will restrict the PCHA right to terminate housing and housing assistance if the victim tenant who claims as a defense to an eviction or termination action relating to domestic violence has engaged in fraud and abuse against a federal housing program; especially where such fraud and abuse can be shown to have existed before the claim of domestic violence was made. Such fraud and abuse includes but is not limited to unreported income and ongoing boarders and lodgers violations, or damage to property.

6.0 Statements of Responsibility of Tenant Victim, the PCHA to the Victim, and to the Larger Community.

- 6.1 A tenant victim has no less duty and responsibility under the lease to meet and comply with the terms of the lease than any other tenant not making such a claim. Ultimately all tenants must be able to take personal responsibility for themselves and exercise control over their households in order to continue their housing and housing assistance. The PCHA will continue to issue lease violation notices to all residents who violate the lease including those who claim a defense of domestic violence.

- 6.2 PCHA recognizes the pathologic dynamic and cycle of domestic violence and a victim of domestic violence will be referred to local victim support service providers to help victims break the cycle of domestic violence through counseling, referral and development of a safety strategy.
- 6.3 A tenant victim must take personal responsibility for exercising control over their household by accepting assistance and complying with the safety strategy or plan to best of victim's ability and reason under the circumstances. Failure to do this may be seen as other good cause.
- 6.4 All damages including lock changes will be the responsibility of the tenant victim. This is in keeping with other agency policies governing tenant caused damages.

7.0 Notice to Applicants, and Participants.

PCHA shall provide notice to applicants, participants, tenants, managers and owners of their rights and obligations under Section 3.4 Confidentiality and Section 4.0 Appropriate Basis for Denial of Admission, Assistance or Tenancy.

- 7.1 If the PCHA, owner or manager knows that an applicant to or participant in a PCHA housing program is the victim of dating violence, domestic violence or stalking, the PCHA, owner or manager shall inform that person of this Policy and the person's rights under it.

8.0 Reporting Requirements

PCHA shall include in its 5-year plan a statement of goals, objectives, policies or programs that will serve the needs of victims. PCHA shall also include a description of activities, services or programs provided or offered either directly or in partnership with other service providers to victims, to help victims obtain or maintain housing or to prevent the abuse or to enhance the safety of victims.

9.0 Conflict and Scope

This Policy does not enlarge PCHA's duty under any law, regulation or ordinance. If this Policy conflicts with the applicable law, regulation or ordinance, the law, regulation or ordinance shall control. If this Policy conflicts with another PCHA policy such as its Statement of Policies, this Policy will control.

10.0 Amendment

The Executive Director may amend this policy when it is reasonably necessary to effectuate the Policy's intent, purpose or interpretation. The proposed amendment along with the rationale for the amendment shall be submitted to the Executive Director for consideration. Where reasonably necessary, the Executive Director may approve the amendment. The amendment shall be effective and incorporated on the date that the Executive Director signs the amendment.