

BETHLEHEM HOUSING AUTHORITY

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VAWA) POLICY

I. Purpose and Applicability

The purpose of this policy (herein called "Policy") is to implement the applicable provisions of the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005 (Pub. L. 109-162) and more generally to set forth BHA's policies and procedures regarding domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking, as hereinafter defined.

This Policy shall be applicable to the administration by BHA of all federally subsidized public housing and Section 8 rental assistance under the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. §1437 *et seq.*). Notwithstanding its title, this policy is gender-neutral, and its protections are available to males who are victims of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking as well as female victims of such violence.

II. Goals and Objectives

This Policy has the following principal goals and objectives:

- A. Maintaining compliance with all applicable legal requirements imposed by VAWA;
- B. Ensuring the physical safety of victims of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking who are assisted by BHA;
- C. Providing and maintaining housing opportunities for victims of domestic violence dating violence, or stalking;
- D. Creating and maintaining collaborative arrangements between BHA, law enforcement authorities, victim service providers, and others to promote the safety and well-being of victims of actual and threatened domestic violence, dating violence and stalking, who are assisted by BHA; and
- E. Taking appropriate action in response to an incident or incidents of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking, affecting individuals assisted by BHA.

III. Other BHA Policies and Procedures

This Policy shall be referenced in and attached to BHA's Five-Year Public Housing Agency Plan and shall be incorporated in and made a part of BHA's Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy. BHA's annual public housing agency plan shall also contain information concerning BHA's activities, services or programs relating to domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

E. *Perpetrator* – means person who commits an act of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking against a victim.

V. Admissions and Screening

A. *Non-Denial of Assistance*. BHA will not deny admission to public housing or to the Section 8 rental assistance program to any person because that person is or has been a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking, provided that such person is otherwise qualified for such admission.

B. *Mitigation of Disqualifying Information*. When so requested in writing by an applicant for assistance whose history includes incidents in which the applicant was a victim of domestic violence, BHA, may but shall not be obligated to, take such information into account in mitigation of potentially disqualifying information, such as poor credit history or previous damage to a dwelling. If requested by an applicant to take such mitigating information into account, BHA shall be entitled to conduct such inquiries as are reasonably necessary to verify the claimed history of domestic violence and its probable relevance to the potentially disqualifying information. BHA will not disregard or mitigate potentially disqualifying information if the applicant household includes a perpetrator of a previous incident or incidents of domestic violence.

VI. Termination of Tenancy or Assistance

A. *VAWA Protections*. Under VAWA, public housing residents and persons assisted under the Section 8 rental assistance program have the following specific protections, which will be observed by BHA:

1. An incident or incidents of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking will not be considered to be a “serious or repeated” violation of the lease by the victim or threatened victim of that violence and will not be good cause for terminating the tenancy or occupancy rights of or assistance to the victim of that violence.

2. In addition to the foregoing, tenancy or assistance will not be terminated by BHA as a result of criminal activity, if that criminal activity is directly related to domestic violence, dating violence or stalking engaged in by a member of the assisted household, a guest or another person under the tenant’s control, and the tenant or an immediate family member is the victim or threatened victim of this criminal activity. However, the protection against termination of tenancy or assistance described in this paragraph is subject to the following limitations:

- (a) Nothing contained in this paragraph shall limit any otherwise available authority of BHA’ or a Section 8 owner or manager to terminate tenancy, evict, or to terminate assistance, as the case may be, for any violation of a lease or program requirement not premised on the act or acts of domestic violence,

Housing and Urban Development (HUD), that the individual is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking that the incident or incidents in question are bona fide incidents of actual or threatened abuse meeting the requirements of the applicable definition(s) set forth in this policy. The incident or incidents in question must be described in reasonable detail as required in the HUD-approved form, and the completed certification must include the name of the perpetrator.

2. *Other documentation* - by providing to BHA or to the requesting Section 8 owner or manager 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 the domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, or the effects of the abuse, described in such documentation. The professional providing the documentation must sign and 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 meeting the requirements of the applicable definition(s) set forth in this policy. The victim of the incident or incidents of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking described in the documentation must also sign and attest to the documentation under penalty of perjury.

3. *Police or court record* - by providing to BHA or to the requesting Section 8 owner or manager a Federal, State, tribal, territorial, or local police or court record describing the incident or incidents in question.

B. *Time allowed to provide verification / failure to provide.* An individual who claims protection against adverse action based on an incident or incidents of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, and who is requested by BHA, or a Section 8 owner or manager to provide verification, must provide such verification within 14 business days (*i.e.*, 14 calendar days, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and federally-recognized holidays) after receipt of the request for verification. Failure to provide verification, in proper form within such time will result in loss of protection under VAWA and this policy against a proposed adverse action.

C. *Waiver of verification requirement.* The Executive Director of BHA, or a Section 8 owner or manager, may, with respect to any specific case, waive the above-stated requirements for verification and provide the benefits of this policy based on the victim's statement or other corroborating evidence. Such waiver may be granted in the sole discretion of the Executive Director, owner or manager. Any such waiver must be in writing. Waiver in a particular instance or instances shall not operate as precedent for, or create any right to, waiver in any other case or cases, regardless of similarity in circumstances.

VIII. Confidentiality

A. *Right of confidentiality.* All information (including the fact that an individual is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking) provided to BHA or to a Section 8 owner or manager in connection with a verification required under Section VII of this policy or provided in lieu of such verification where a waiver of verification is granted, shall be retained

program and has moved from the unit in order to protect a health or safety of an individual member of the household who is or has been the victim of domestic violence dating violence or stalking and who reasonably believes that the tenant or other household member will be imminently threatened by harm from further violence if the individual remains in the present dwelling unit.

X. Court Orders/Family Break-up

A. *Court orders.* It is BHA's policy to honor orders entered by courts of competent jurisdiction affecting individuals assisted by BHA and their property. This includes cooperating with law enforcement authorities to enforce civil protection orders issued for the protection of victims and addressing the distribution of personal property among household members in cases where a family breaks up.

B. *Family break-up.* Other BHA policies regarding family break-up are contained in BHA's Public Housing Admissions and Continued Occupancy Plan (ACOP) and its Section 8 Administrative Plan.

XI. Relationships with Service Providers

It is the policy of BHA to cooperate with organizations and entities, both private and governmental, that provide shelter and/or services to victims of domestic violence. If BHA staff become aware that an individual assisted by BHA is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, BHA will refer the victim to such providers of shelter or services as appropriate. Notwithstanding the foregoing, this Policy does not create any legal obligation requiring BHA either to maintain a relationship with any particular provider of shelter or services to victims of domestic violence or to make a referral in any particular case. BHA's annual public housing agency plan shall describe providers of shelter or services to victims of domestic violence with which BHA has referral or other cooperative relationships.

XII. Notification

BHA shall provide written notification to applicants, tenants, and Section 8 owners and managers, concerning the rights and obligations created under VAWA relating to confidentiality, denial of assistance and, termination of tenancy or assistance.

XIII. Relationship with Other Applicable Laws

Neither VAWA nor this Policy implementing it shall preempt or supersede any provision of Federal, State or local law that provides greater protection than that provided under VAWA for victims of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking.

XIV. Amendment

This policy may be amended from time to time by BHA as required by law.

**BETHLEHEM HOUSING AUTHORITY
NOTIFICATION OF RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT**

To: Tenant Name & Address: _____

From: Bethlehem Housing Authority

In January 2006, President Bush signed a law known as the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005. Portions of this law create new protections for victims of domestic violence, dating violence and stalking who are residents in public housing or who are assisted with Section 8 rental assistance.

The following is a brief summary of the principal provisions of the new law, which is known as "VAWA". Additional details are set forth in the housing authority VAWA policy delivered with this notice.

You should know that:

1. **Admissions:** The housing authority may not deny admission to a public housing development to any applicant on the basis that the applicant is or has been the victim of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking (see attached Policy for definitions of these terms), if the applicant otherwise qualifies for assistance or admission.

2. **Lease terms:**

- An incident or incidents of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking will not be considered to be a "serious or repeated" violation of the lease by the victim or threatened victim of that violence and will not be good cause for terminating the tenancy or occupancy rights of the victim of that violence.
- Additionally, your tenancy will not be terminated as a result of criminal activity, if that criminal activity is directly related to domestic violence, dating violence or stalking engaged in by a member of your household, a guest or another person under your control, and you or an immediate family member is the victim.

You should also know that there are some limitations to these protections:

- Your tenancy *may be* terminated if the housing authority can demonstrate "an actual and imminent threat" to other tenants or to persons employed at or providing services to the development.
- So long as the housing authority does not apply a more demanding standard to you than to other tenants, your tenancy *may be* terminated for lease violations that