

## New Manual on the Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act (VESSA)

The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law and the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law recently published *VESSA: The Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act, Keeping Your Job and Keeping Safe, A Guide for Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence*.

The manual explains what the Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act, or VESSA, provides, who can take advantage of the law, and how survivors can file VESSA claims. The manual has sample documents and copies of official forms that survivors may photocopy and use. To educate advocates and employers about the law, Wendy Pollack, a senior attorney at the Shriver Center, has been conducting VESSA training sessions around the state.

In recent years, more and more attention has been paid to the negative impact of domestic violence and sexual assault on victims and their ability to obtain and maintain employment. A handful of states, including Illinois, have enacted laws providing targeted leave for domestic violence or sexual violence victims who need time from work to address the violence in their lives. In Illinois this law is VESSA, which has been in effect since August 2003. It is the most comprehensive set of employment law protection provisions for victims of domestic and sexual violence in the country.

VESSA protects the workplace rights of female and male employees who are victims of domestic or sexual violence as well as the rights of employees who have family or household members, including spouses, parents, sons, and daughters and other individuals who live together and who are victims of domestic or sexual violence. VESSA is intended to help employees keep their jobs and stay safe. VESSA provides specifically:

- **Entitlement to unpaid, job-guaranteed leave.** VESSA allows eligible employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave from work during any 12-month period to address domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.
- **Employment sustainability.** VESSA prohibits employers from refusing to hire, discharging, harassing, or otherwise discriminating against applicants and

- employees with respect to compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment based on the applicants' or employees' status as a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.
- **Enforcement.** VESSA is administered and enforced by the Illinois Department of Labor. A complaint must be filed within three years after the alleged violation occurred. An employee may recover damages, for example, lost wages and employment benefits, attorney fees, and other relief such as reinstatement and promotion.

To obtain a copy of *VESSA: The Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act, Keeping Your Job and Keeping Safe, A Guide for Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence*, visit the Shriver Center's website, [www.povertylaw.org/advocacy/documents/VESSA%20manual%20final%20092005.pdf](http://www.povertylaw.org/advocacy/documents/VESSA%20manual%20final%20092005.pdf), or the Chicago Lawyers' Committee website, [www.clccrul.org](http://www.clccrul.org).

For more information or to schedule a VESSA training, contact Wendy Pollack at 312.263.3830 ext. 238, or [wendypollack@povertylaw.org](mailto:wendypollack@povertylaw.org)