



## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT 2005

### TITLE VI – HOUSING

Advocates and survivors consistently report that victims of domestic and sexual violence experience major barriers in obtaining and maintaining housing independent from their abusers. Reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act in 2005 will improve safety for victims in housing and shelter by bringing desperately needed resources, collaborations, and protections to help end homelessness and domestic and sexual violence.

#### **NEED FOR COLLABORATION BETWEEN VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS, HOMELESS SERVICE PROVIDERS AND HOUSING AGENCIES**

- The link between domestic violence and homelessness is undeniable. Among cities surveyed, 44% identified domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness.<sup>i</sup>
- 92% of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives.<sup>ii</sup> Of all homeless women and children, 60% have been abused by age 12, and 63% have been victims of intimate partner violence as adults.<sup>iii</sup>

**Response** – VAWA 2005 would authorize a collaboration and cross-training program to develop comprehensive community responses to domestic violence and homelessness. This program would help protect victims residing in homeless shelters, as well as provide additional housing options for victims to prevent them from becoming homeless.

#### **LACK OF SAFE, DECENT, AFFORDABLE LONG-TERM HOUSING**

- 36,900,000 households in the United States (31% of all households) lacked safe, decent, and affordable housing in 2001.<sup>iv</sup>
- Homeless individuals are more likely to sustain housing when given a permanent home. When afforded residential stability, homeless persons are considerably less likely to return to emergency shelter.<sup>v</sup>
- Victims of domestic violence often return to their abusers because they cannot find long-term housing.<sup>vi</sup>

**Response** – Modeled after extremely successful affordable housing, community development and “housing first” programs across the nation in urban, suburban and rural areas, VAWA 2005 would fund collaborative efforts to create permanent housing options for victims that help develop communities and leverage private dollars.

#### **LACK OF TRANSITIONAL HOUSING TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN EMERGENCY SHELTER AND PERMANENT HOUSING**

- 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.<sup>vii</sup> Many domestic violence shelters are unable to house families longer than 30 days to allow space for individuals in immediate danger.
- There are not enough federal housing rent vouchers available to accommodate the number of victims and their children in need. Some people remain on the waiting list for years, while some lists are closed.<sup>viii</sup>
- As a result, battered women are staying longer in emergency domestic violence shelters, and the shelters are frequently full and must turn families away. Request for emergency shelter by homeless families with children increased in 78% of U.S. cities surveyed in 2003.<sup>ix</sup> In the same year, 32% of the requests for shelter by homeless families went unmet due to the lack of emergency shelter beds available.<sup>x</sup>
- Transitional housing resources and services provide an essential continuum between emergency shelter and independent living. The majority of battered women in transitional housing programs state that had these programs not existed, they would have returned to their abusers.<sup>xi</sup>

**Response** – VAWA 2005 would expand the existing transitional housing program for victims to include funds for creating and operating transitional housing projects and helping victims maintain safety and self-sufficiency.

**EXISTING HOUSING RESOURCES ARE NOT ACCESSIBLE FOR, AND MAY BE DENIED TO, VICTIMS BECAUSE OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, DATING VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ASSAULT AND STALKING PERPETUATED AGAINST THEM**

- The Department of Housing and Urban Development's "one-strike" policy allows federally subsidized housing providers to evict entire families for crimes committed or disturbances created by family members or "guests." Though the law does not target victims of domestic violence, many have been evicted or denied housing due to the crimes committed against them or their abuser's actions.
- Battered women and their families across the country are being discriminated against, denied access to, and even evicted from public, subsidized, and private housing because of their status as victims of domestic violence or the abuse perpetrated against them.<sup>xiii</sup> Landlords

frequently turn away victims who have protection orders or other indications of their status as victims of domestic violence.

- Landlords often threaten victims with penalties or evictions or unfairly hold victims accountable for the behavior of their abusers. Consequently, victims express fear of calling law enforcement if they are in danger because they are concerned they will be evicted.<sup>xiii</sup> Some advocates advise battered women not to seek protection orders because seeking this legal protection may place their housing in peril.

**Responses** – VAWA 2005 would:

Authorize a grant program to help public and Indian housing authorities and assisted housing providers respond to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking in a way that protects victims while holding perpetrators accountable.

Increase the ability of the Low Income Housing Assistance Voucher and Public Housing programs to meet the safety and housing needs of victims.

Protect the safety and confidentiality of victims within the homeless services system.

Ensure that victims have access to the criminal justice system without jeopardizing their current or future housing.

**The programs described here are proposals under consideration for inclusion in the VAWA reauthorization bill that Members of Congress will introduce in early 2005. As the bill has not been finalized, we cannot be certain that the proposals will be included as described in this document.**

<sup>i</sup> U.S. Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: A 27-City Survey*, December 2004.  
<sup>ii</sup> Browne, A. & Bassuk, S., "Intimate Violence in the Lives of Homeless and Poor Housed Women: Prevalence and Patterns in an Ethnically Diverse Sample," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 67(2) 261-278, April 1997; Browne, A., "Responding to the Needs of Low Income and Homeless Women Who are Survivors of Family Violence," *Journal of American Medical Association*, 53(2), 57-64. Spring 1998.  
<sup>iii</sup> Browne, A. & Bassuk, S., "Intimate Violence in the Lives of Homeless and Poor Housed Women: Prevalence and Patterns in an Ethnically Diverse Sample," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 67(2) 261-278, April 1997; Browne, A., "Responding to the Needs of Low Income and Homeless Women Who are Survivors of Family Violence," *Journal of American Medical Association*, 53(2), 57-64. Spring 1998.  
<sup>iv</sup> *Housing in America: Recent Research on Housing Trends*. Campaign for Housing and Community Development Funding. 2003.  
<sup>v</sup> See: Shinn, M., Weitzman, B. C., Stojanovic, D., Knickman, J. R. Jimenez, L. Duchon, L. and Krantz, D. H. (1998). Predictors of homelessness among families in New York City: From shelter request to housing stability. *American Journal of Public Health*, 88(11), 1651-1657; Friedman, D.H., Meschede, T. and Hayes, M. (2003). Surviving against the odds: Families' journeys off welfare and out of homelessness. *Cityscape: A journal of Policy Development and Research*, 6(2), 187-206; Culhane, D. P. (1992). The quandaries of shelter reform: An appraisal of efforts to "manage" homelessness. *Social Service Review*, 66, 428-440; Stretch, J. J. & Krueger, L. W. (1992). Five year cohort study of homeless families: A joint policy research venture. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, XIX(4), 73-88.  
<sup>vi</sup> Correia, A., *Housing and Battered Women: A case study of domestic violence programs in Iowa*. Harrisburg, PA: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. March, 1999.  
<sup>vii</sup> *Lifting the Voices of Homeless Women*, Roofless Women's Action Research Mobilization, Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development, 1997.  
<sup>viii</sup> Davies, J. & Hammeal-Urban, R. *Federal Housing and Domestic Violence: Introduction to Programs, Policy, and Advocacy Opportunities*, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. 1999.  
<sup>ix</sup> U.S. Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: A 27-City Survey*, December 2004.  
<sup>x</sup> U.S. Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: A 27-City Survey*, December 2004.  
<sup>xi</sup> Melbin, Anna, Chris Sullivan & Debra Cain. "Transitional Supportive Housing Programs: Battered Women's Perspectives and Recommendations" *AFFILIA*, Vol. 18 No. 4. 2003.  
<sup>xii</sup> National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. *Interviews with State Coalitions and Local Shelter Programs*. Spring 2003.  
<sup>xiii</sup> Texas Council on Family Violence and National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Spring 2003.