U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, DC 20410-2000

OFFICE OF FAIR HOUSING
AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

February 9, 2011

MEMORANDUM FOR: FHEO Office Directors
FHEO Regional Directors

FROM: Sara K. Pratt, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Enforcement and Programs

SUBJECT: Assessing Claims of Housing Discrimination against Victims of Domestic Violence under the Fair Housing Act (FHAct) and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

I. Purpose

This memorandum provides guidance to FHEO headquarters and field staff on assessing claims by domestic violence victims of housing discrimination under the Fair Housing Act (FHAct). Such claims are generally based on sex, but may also involve other protected classes, in particular race or national origin. This memorandum discusses the legal theories behind such claims and provides examples of recent cases involving allegations of housing discrimination against domestic violence victims. This memorandum also explains how the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)[1] protects some domestic violence victims from eviction, denial of housing, or termination of assistance on the basis of the violence perpetrated by their abusers.

II. Background

Survivors of domestic violence often face housing discrimination because of their history or the acts of their abusers. Congress has acknowledged that "[w]omen and families across the country are being discriminated against, denied access to, and even evicted from public and subsidized housing because of their status as victims of domestic violence."[2] Housing authorities and landlords evict victims under zero-tolerance crime policies, citing the violence of a household member, guest, or other person under the victim's "control."[3] Victims are often evicted after repeated calls to the police for domestic violence incidents because of allegations of disturbance to other tenants. Victims are also evicted because of property damage caused by their abusers. In

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[1] This guidance refers to the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005 (VAWA 2005), which included provisions in Title VI ("Housing Opportunities and Safety for Battered Women and Children") that are applicable to HUD programs. The original version of VAWA, enacted in 1994, did not apply to HUD programs. Note also that HUD recently published its VAWA Final Rule. *See* HUD Programs: Violence Against Women Act Conforming Amendments; Final Rule, 75 Fed. Reg. 66246 (October 27, 2010).

[2] 42 U.S.C. § 14043e(3) (findings published in the Violence Against Women Act). Note that VAWA also protects male victims of domestic violence. *See* HUD Programs: Violence Against Women Act Conforming Amendments; Final Rule, 75 Fed. Reg. 66246, 66251 ("VAWA 2005 does protect men. Although the name of the statute references only women, the substance of the statute makes it clear that its protections are not exclusively applicable to women.").

[3] *See* 24 CFR § 5.100.

many of these cases, adverse housing action punishes victims for the violence inflicted upon them. This "double victimization"[4] is unfair and, as explained in this guidance, may be illegal.

Statistics show that women are overwhelmingly the victims of domestic violence.[5] An estimated 1.3 million women are the victims of assault by an intimate partner each year, and about 1 in 4 women will experience intimate partner violence in their lifetimes.[6] The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 85% of victims of domestic violence are women.[7] In 2009, women were about five times as likely as men to experience domestic violence.[8] These statistics show that discrimination against victims of domestic violence is almost always discrimination against women. Thus, domestic violence survivors who are denied housing, evicted, or deprived of assistance based on the violence in their homes may have a cause of action for sex discrimination under the Fair Housing Act.[9]

In addition, certain other protected classes experience disproportionately high rates of domestic violence. For example, African-American and Native American women experience higher rates of domestic violence than white women. Black women experience intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of white females, and about 2.5 times the rate of women of other races.[10] Native American women are victims of violent crime, including rape and sexual assault, at more than double the rate of other racial groups.[11] Women of certain national origins and immigrant women also experience domestic violence at disproportionate rates.[12] This means that victims of domestic violence may also have a cause of action for race or national origin discrimination under the Fair Housing Act.

III. HUD's "One Strike" Rule and The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

In 2001, the Department issued a rule allowing housing authorities and landlords to evict tenants for criminal activity committed by any household member or guest, commonly known as the "one strike" rule.[13] The rule allows owners of public and Section 8 assisted housing to terminate a tenant's lease because of criminal activity by "a tenant, any member of the tenant's household, a

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[4] *See* Lenora M. Lapidus, *Doubly Victimized: Housing Discrimination Against Victims of Domestic Violence*, 11 J. GENDER, SOC. POL'Y & L. 377 (2003).

[5] We recognize that men also experience domestic violence. However, because of the wide disparity in victimization, and because many FHAct claims will be based on the disparate impact of domestic violence on women, we use feminine pronouns throughout this guidance.

[6] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States* (2003).

[7] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, *Intimate Partner Violence, 1993-2001* (2003).

[8] Jennifer R. Truman & Michael R. Rand, U.S. Department of Justice, *Criminal Victimization, 2009* (2010).

[9] Domestic violence by same-sex partners would be analyzed in the same manner and would be based on sex and any other applicable protected classes.

[10] *Id.*

[11] Steven W. Perry, U.S. Dep't of Justice, NCJ 203097, *A Bureau of Justice Statistics Statistical Profile, 1992-2002: American Indians and Crime* (2004).

[12] For statistics on specific groups, *see* American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence, Survey of Recent Statistics, http://new.abanet.org/domesticviolence/Pages/Statistics.aspx.

[13] Screening and Eviction for Drug Abuse and Other Criminal Activity, 66 Fed. Reg. 28776 (May 24, 2001) (amending 24 CFR pts. 5, 200, 247, 880, 884, 891, 960, 966, and 982) (often referred to as the "one strike" rule).

guest or another person under the tenant's control"[14] that "threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents (including property management staff residing on the premises); or... threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of their residences by persons residing in the immediate vicinity of the premises."[15] This policy would seem to allow evictions of women for the violent acts of their spouses, cohabiting partners, or visitors. However, the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005 (VAWA)[16] prohibits such evictions in public housing, voucher, and Section 8 project-based programs. VAWA protects victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.[17]

VAWA provides that being a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking is not a basis for denial of assistance or admission to public or Section 8 tenant-based and project-based assisted housing. Further, incidents or threats of abuse will not be construed as serious or repeated violations of the lease or as other "good cause" for termination of the assistance, tenancy, or occupancy rights of a victim of abuse. Moreover, VAWA prohibits the termination of assistance, tenancy, or occupancy rights based on criminal activity directly relating 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 if the tenant or immediate member of the tenant's family is a victim of that domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking.[18]

VAWA also allows owners and management agents to request certification from a tenant that she is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking and that the incidence(s) of threatened or actual abuse are bona fide in determining whether the protections afforded under VAWA are applicable.[19] The Department has issued forms for housing authorities and landlords to use for such certification requests,[20] but tenants may also present third-party documentation of the

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[14] 24 CFR § 5.100.

[15] 24 CFR § 5.859.

[16] Pub. L. 109-162, 119 Stat. 2960 (2006). For the Department's final rule on VAWA, see HUD Programs: Violence Against Women Act Conforming Amendments; Final Rule, 75 Fed. Reg. 66246 (Oct. 27, 2010) (amending 24 CFR pts. 5, 91, 880, 882, 883, 884, 886, 891, 903, 960, 966, 982, and 983).

[17] Each of these terms is defined in VAWA and HUD's corresponding regulations. *See* HUD Programs: Violence Against Women Act Conforming Amendments; Final Rule, 75 Fed. Reg. 66246, 66258.

[18] Note the exception to these provisions at 24 C.F.R. § 5.2005(d)(2), which states that VAWA does not limit the authority of a PHA, owner, or management agent to evict or terminate a tenant's assistance if they can demonstrate an actual and imminent threat to other tenants or those employed or providing services at the property if that tenant is not terminated. However, this exception is limited by §5.2005(d)(3), which states that a PHA, owner, or management agent can terminate assistance only when there are no other actions that could reduce or eliminate the threat. Other actions include transferring the victim to different unit, barring the perpetrator from the property, contacting law enforcement to increase police presence or developing other plans to keep the property safe, or seeking other legal remedies to prevent the perpetrator from acting on a threat.

[19] 42 U.S.C. §1437d(u)(1)(A) (public housing program), 42 U.S.C. §1437f(ee)(1) (voucher programs).

[20] HUD Housing Notice 09-15 transmits Form HUD-91066, Certification of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence or Stalking for use by owners and management agents administering one of Multifamily Housing's project-based Section 8 programs and Form HUD-91067, the HUD-approved Lease Addendum, for use with the applicable HUD model lease for the covered project-based Section 8 program. HUD Public and Indian Housing Notice 2006-42 transmits form HUD-50066, Certification of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence or Stalking, for use in the Public Housing Program, Housing Choice Voucher Program (including project-based vouchers), Section 8 Project-Based Certification Program, and Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Program. See also PIH Notice 2006-23, Implementation of the Violence Against Women and Justice Department Reauthorization Act of 2005.

abuse, including court records, police reports, or 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 abuse or the effects of the abuse.[21] Finally, VAWA allows housing authorities and landlords to bifurcate a lease in a domestic violence situation in order to evict the abuser and allow the victim to keep her housing.[22]

While VAWA provides important protections for victims of domestic violence, it is limited in scope. For example, it does not provide for damages.[23] In addition, VAWA does not provide an explicit private cause of action to women who are illegally evicted. Moreover, VAWA only protects women in public housing, voucher, and Section 8 project-based programs, so domestic violence victims in private housing have no similar protection from actions taken against them based on that violence. VAWA also may not protect a woman who does not provide the requisite documentation of violence,[24] while a claim of discrimination under the Fair Housing Act is not dependent on compliance with the VAWA requirements. In short, when a victim is denied housing, evicted, or has her assistance terminated because she has been a victim of domestic violence, the FHAct might be implicated and we may need to investigate whether that denial is based on, for example, race or sex.

IV. Legal Theories under the Fair Housing Act: Direct Evidence, Unequal Treatment, and Disparate Impact

Direct evidence. In some cases, landlords enforce facially discriminatory policies. These policies explicitly treat women differently from men. Such policies are often based on gender stereotypes about abused women. For example, if a landlord tells a female domestic violence victim that he does not accept women with a history of domestic violence as tenants because they always go back to the men who abuse them, his statement is direct evidence of discrimination based on sex. Investigations in direct evidence cases should focus on finding evidence about whether or not the discriminatory statement was made, whether the statement was applied to others to identify other potential victims, and whether it reflects a policy or practice by the landlord. The usual questions that address jurisdiction also apply.

Unequal treatment. In some cases, a landlord engages in unequal treatment of victims of domestic violence in comparison to victims of other crimes. Or a landlord's seemingly gender-neutral policy may be unequally applied, resulting in different treatment based on sex. For example, a policy of evicting households for criminal activity may be applied selectively against women who have been abused by their partners and not against the male perpetrators of the domestic violence. If there is evidence that women are being treated differently because of their status as victims of domestic violence, an unequal treatment theory applies. If an investigator finds evidence of unequal treatment, the investigation shifts to discovering the respondent's reasons for the differences and

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[21] 42 U.S.C. §1437d(u)(1)(C); 42 U.S.C. § 1437f(ee)(1)(c).

[22] 42 U.S.C. §1437d(l)(6)(B); 42 U.S.C. § 1437f(c)(9)(C) .

[23] Remedies available under VAWA include, for example, the traditional PIH grievance process. *See* HUD Programs: Violence Against Women Act Conforming Amendments; Final Rule, 75 Fed. Reg. 66246, 66255.

[24] While VAWA 2005 allows owners and PHAs to request certification of domestic violence from victims, the law also provides that owners and PHAs "[a]t their discretion . . . may provide benefits to an individual based solely on the individual's statement or other corroborating evidence." 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437d(u)(1)(D); 42 U.S.C.A. § 1437(f)(ee)(1)(D).

investigating each reason to determine whether the evidence supports or refutes each reason. If a nondiscriminatory reason(s) is articulated, the investigation shifts again to examining the evidence to determine whether or not the reason(s) given is supported by the evidence or is a pretext for discrimination.[25]

Disparate impact. In some cases, there is no direct evidence of unequal treatment, but a facially neutral housing policy, procedure, or practice disproportionately affects domestic violence victims. In these cases, a disparate impact analysis is appropriate. Disparate impact cases often arise in the context of "zero-tolerance" policies, under which the entire household is evicted for the criminal activity of one household member. The theory is that, even when consistently applied, women may be disproportionately affected by these policies because, as the overwhelming majority of domestic violence victims, women are often evicted as a result of the violence of their abusers.

There are four steps to a disparate impact analysis. First, the investigator must identify the specific policy, procedure, or practice of the landlord's that is allegedly discriminatory. This process means both the identification of the policy, procedure, or practice and the examination of what types of crimes trigger the application of the policy. Second, the investigator must determine whether or not that policy, procedure, or practice was consistently applied. This step is important because it reveals the correct framework for the investigation. If the policy is applied unequally, then the proper analysis is unequal treatment, not disparate impact. If, however, the policy was applied consistently to all tenants, then a disparate impact analysis applies, and the investigation proceeds to the next step.

Third, the investigation must determine whether or not the particular policy, procedure, or practice has a significant adverse impact on domestic violence victims and if so, how many of those victims were women (or members of a certain race or national origin). Statistical evidence is generally used to identify the scope of the impact on a group protected against discrimination. These statistics should be as particularized as possible; they could demonstrate the impact of the policy as to applicants for a specific building or property, or the impact on applicants or residents for all of the landlord's operations. For example, in a sex discrimination case, the investigation may uncover evidence that women in one apartment complex were evicted more often than men under a zero-tolerance crime policy. It would not matter that the landlord did not intend to discriminate against women, or that the policy was applied consistently. Proof of disparate impact claims is not an exact science. Courts have not agreed on any precise percentage or ratio that conclusively establishes a prima facie case. Rather, what constitutes a sufficiently disparate impact will depend on the particular facts and circumstances of each case.

If the investigation reveals a disparate impact based on sex, race, or national origin, the investigation then shifts to eliciting the respondent's reasons for enforcing the policy. It is critical to thoroughly investigate these reasons. Why was the policy enacted? What specific outcome was it meant to achieve or prevent? Were there any triggering events? Were any alternatives considered, and if so, why were they rejected? Is there any evidence that the policy has been effective? What constitutes a sufficient justification will vary according to the circumstances. In general, the investigation will examine whether or not the offered justification is real and supported by a substantial business justification. For the purposes of this memorandum, it is important to

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[25] *See McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green*, 411 U.S. 792 (1973) for an explanation of the burden-shifting formula.

understand that an investigation must identify and evaluate the evidence supporting and refuting the justification.

Even if there is sufficient justification for the policy, there may be a less discriminatory alternative available to the respondent. A disparate impact investigation must consider possible alternative policies and analyze whether each policy would achieve the same objective with less discriminatory impact. For example, in a case of discriminatory eviction under a zero-tolerance policy, a landlord could adopt a policy of evicting only the wrongdoer and not innocent victims. This policy would protect tenants without unfairly penalizing victims of violence.

In summary, an investigation of a disparate impact case must seek evidence that a specific policy of the landlord's caused a substantial, disproportionate, adverse impact on a protected class of persons. Proving a disparate impact claim will generally depend on statistical data demonstrating the disparity and a causal link between the policy and the disparity; discriminatory intent is irrelevant.

V. Fair Housing Cases Involving Domestic Violence

Eviction Cases. Victims are often served with eviction notices following domestic violence incidents. Landlords cite the danger posed to other tenants by the abuser, property damage caused by the abuser, or other reasons for eviction. Several cases have challenged these evictions as violations of VAWA or the Fair Housing Act.

Alvera v. CBM Group, Case No. 01-857 (D. Or. 2001).[26] The victim was assaulted by her husband in their apartment. She obtained a restraining order against her husband, and he was subsequently arrested and jailed for the assault. She provided a copy of the restraining order to the property manager. The property manager then served her with a 24-hour eviction notice based on the incident of domestic violence. The notice specified: "You, someone in your control, or your pet, has seriously threatened to immediately inflict personal injury, or has inflicted personal injury upon the landlord or other tenants." The victim then submitted an application for a one-bedroom apartment in the same building. Management denied the application and refused to accept her rent. After a second application, management finally approved her for a one-bedroom apartment, but warned her that "any type of recurrence" of domestic violence would lead to her eviction.

The victim filed a complaint with HUD, which investigated her case and issued a charge of discrimination against the apartment management group. She elected to pursue the case in federal court. The parties later agreed to settle the lawsuit. The consent decree, approved by the Oregon district court in 2001, requires that the management group agree not to "evict, or otherwise discriminate against tenants because they have been victims of violence, including domestic violence" and change its policies accordingly. Employees of the management group must participate in education about discrimination and fair housing law. The management group also agreed to pay compensatory damages to the victim.

Warren v. Ypsilanti Housing Authority, Case No. 4:02-cv-40034 (E.D. Mich. 2003). The victim's ex-boyfriend broke into her house and physically abused her. She called the police to

[26] A copy of the determination is attached to this memo.

report the attack. When the Ypsilanti Housing Authority (YHA) learned of the attack, it attempted to evict the victim and her son under its zero-tolerance crime policy. The ACLU sued the YHA for discrimination, arguing that because victims of domestic violence are almost always women, the policy of evicting domestic violence victims based on the violence perpetrated against them had a disparate impact based on sex in violation of the federal Fair Housing Act and state law. The parties reached a settlement, under which the YHA agreed to cease evicting domestic violence victims under its "one-strike" policy and pay money damages to the victim.

Bouley v. Young-Sabourin 394 F. Supp. 2d 675 (D. Vt. 2005). The victim called the police after her husband attacked her in their home. She obtained a restraining order against her husband and informed her landlord. The landlord spoke to the victim about the incident, encouraging her to resolve the dispute and seek help through religion. The victim told her landlord that she would not let her husband return to the apartment and was not interested in religious help. The landlord then served her with a notice of eviction, stating that it was "clear that the violence would continue." In a ruling on the parties' cross-motions for summary judgment, the court held that the victim had presented a prima facie case of sex discrimination under the Fair Housing Act. The case later settled.

T.J. v. St. Louis Housing Authority (2005). The victim endured ongoing threats and harassment after ending her relationship with her abusive boyfriend. He repeatedly broke the windows of her apartment when she refused to let him enter. She obtained a restraining order and notified her landlord, who issued her a notice of lease violation for the property damage caused by the ex-boyfriend and required her to pay for the damage, saying she was responsible for her domestic situation. Her boyfriend finally broke into her apartment and, after she escaped, vandalized it. The housing authority attempted to evict her based on this incident. The victim filed a complaint with HUD, which conciliated the case. The conciliation agreement requires the housing authority to relocate her to another apartment, refund the money she paid for the broken windows, ban her ex-boyfriend from the property where she lived, and send its employees to domestic violence awareness training.

Lewis v. North End Village, Case No. 2:07-cv-10757 (E.D.Mich. 2007). The victim obtained a personal protection order against her abusive ex-boyfriend. Months later, the ex-boyfriend attempted to break into the apartment, breaking the windows and front door. The management company that owned her apartment evicted the victim and her children based on the property damage caused by the ex-boyfriend. With the help of the ACLU of Michigan, she filed a complaint against the management company in federal court, alleging sex discrimination under the FHAct. The case ultimately settled, with the management company agreeing to new, nondiscriminatory domestic violence policies and money damages for the victim.

Brooklyn Landlord v. R.F. (Civil Court of Kings County 2007). The victim's ex-boyfriend continued to harass, stalk, and threaten her after she ended their relationship. In late April 2006, he came to her apartment in the middle of the night, banging on the door and yelling. The building security guard called by the victim was unable to reason with her abuser, who left before the police arrived. One week later, the abuser came back to the building, confronted the same security guard, and shot at him. The victim was served an eviction notice from her Section 8 landlord based on this incident. The victim filed a motion for summary judgment which asserted defenses to eviction

under VAWA and argued that the eviction constituted sex discrimination prohibited by the FHAct. The parties reached a settlement under which the landlord agreed to take measures to prevent the ex-boyfriend from entering the property.

Jones v. Housing Authority of Salt Lake County (D. Utah, filed 2007). The victim applied for and received a Section 8 voucher in 2006. She and her children moved into a house in Kearns, Utah later that year. She allowed her ex-husband, who had previously been abusive, to move into the house. Shortly after he moved in, the victim discovered that he had begun drinking again. After he punched a hole in the wall, the victim asked him to move out. When he refused, she told the Housing Authority that she planned to leave the home with her children to escape the abuse. The Housing Authority required her to sign a notice of termination of her housing assistance. The victim requested a hearing to protest the termination, and the Housing Authority decided that termination of her assistance was appropriate, noting that she had never called the police to report her husband's violent behavior. With the help of Utah Legal Services, she filed a complaint in federal court against the Housing Authority, alleging that the termination of her benefits violated VAWA and the FHAct.

Cleaves-Milan v. AIMCO Elm Creek LP, 1:09-cv-06143 (N.D. Ill., filed October 1, 2009). In 2007, the victim moved into an Elmhurst, Illinois apartment complex with her fiancé and her daughter. Her fiancé soon became abusive, and she ended the relationship. He became upset, produced a gun, and threatened to shoot himself and her. She called police to remove him, obtained an order of protection, and removed him from the lease with the consent of building management. When she attempted to pay her rent, however, building management told her that she was being evicted because "anytime there is a crime in an apartment the household must be evicted." With the help of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, she filed a complaint against the management company for sex discrimination under the Fair Housing Act.

Transfer Cases. Victims will also sometimes request transfers within a housing authority in order to escape an abuser. Two recent cases have challenged the denial of these transfers as sex discrimination under the Fair Housing Act, with mixed results.

Blackwell v. H.A. Housing LP, Civil Action No. 05-cv-01225-LTB-CBS (D. Colo. 2005). The victim's ex-boyfriend broke into her apartment and, over the course of several hours, raped, beat, and stabbed her. She requested a transfer to another complex. Building management refused to grant her the transfer, forcing her and her children into hiding while police pursued her ex-boyfriend. With the help of Colorado Legal Services, the victim filed a complaint in federal court, alleging that the failure to grant her transfer request constituted impermissible discrimination on the basis of sex based on a disparate impact theory. The case eventually settled. The landlord agreed to institute a new domestic violence policy, prohibiting discrimination against domestic violence victims and allowing victims who are in imminent physical danger to request an emergency transfer to another Section 8 property.

Robinson v. Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority, Case No. 1:08-CV-238 (S.D. Ohio 2008). The victim moved into a Cincinnati public housing unit with her children in 2006. She began dating a neighbor, who physically abused her repeatedly. When she tried to end the relationship, he beat her severely and threatened to kill her if she ever returned to the apartment.

She obtained a protection order and applied to the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) for an emergency transfer, but was denied. The victim was paying rent on the apartment but lived with friends and family for safety reasons. With the help of the Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, the victim filed a complaint against CMHA in federal court, alleging that by refusing to grant her occupancy rights granted to other tenants based on the acts of her abuser, CMHA intentionally discriminated against her on the basis of sex. The court denied her motion for a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction, finding that CMHA policy allows emergency transfers only for victims of federal hate crimes, not for victims of domestic violence. The court also distinguished cases of domestic violence-based eviction from the victim's case,[27] saying that CMHA did not violate her rights under the FHAct by denying her a transfer.

VI. Practical Considerations When Working with a Victim of Domestic Violence

When working with a victim of domestic violence, an investigator must be sensitive to the victim's unique circumstances. She is not only a potential victim of housing discrimination, she is also a victim of abuse. Often, a victim who is facing eviction or other adverse action based on domestic violence also faces urgent safety concerns. She may fear that the abuser will return to harm her or her children. An investigator should be aware of resources available to domestic violence victims and may refer a victim to an advocacy organization or to the police.[28] Investigators should also understand that a victim may be hesitant to discuss her history. Victims are often distrustful of "the system" after negative experiences with housing authorities, police, or courts. In order to conduct an effective investigation, investigators should be patient and understanding with victims and try not to appear judgmental or defensive.[29]

VII. Conclusion

The Violence Against Women Act provides protection to some victims of domestic violence who experience housing discrimination but it does not protect them from discrimination based on sex or another protected class. Thus, when a victim is denied housing, evicted, or has her assistance terminated because she has experienced domestic violence, we should investigate whether that denial or other activity violates the Fair Housing Act. Victims may allege sex discrimination, but may also allege discrimination based on other protected classes, such as race or national origin.

Questions regarding this memorandum should be directed to Allison Beach, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Enforcement and Programs, at (202) 619-8046, extension 5830.

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[27] In its order denying Robinson's request for a temporary restraining order and a preliminary injunction, the court cites *Bouley*, *Lewis*, *Warren*, and *Alvera* as cases that "recognized that to evict the women in these situations had the effect of victimizing them twice: first they are subject to abuse and then they are evicted." Order at 6.

[28] Nationwide resources include the National Domestic Violence Hotline, at 1-800-799-SAFE(7233) or www.thehotline.org, and www.womenslaw.org. Either resource can refer victims to local advocates and shelters and provide safety planning advice.

[29] For more advice on working with domestic violence survivors, see Loretta M. Frederick, *Effective Advocacy on Behalf of Battered Women*, The Battered Women's Justice Project, available at http://www.bwjp.org/files/bwjp/articles/Effective_Advocacy_Battered_Women.pdf.

DETERMINATION OF REASONABLE CAUSE

CASE NAME: Alvera v Creekside Village Apartments
CASE NUMBER: 10-99-0538-8

I. JURISDICTION

A complaint was filed with the Department on October 22, 1999, alleging that Ms. Tiffani Ann Alvera, the complainant, was injured by a discriminatory act by the respondents, Creekside Village Apartments, a California Limited Partnership; General Partners Edward and Dorian Mackay; The CBM Group, Inc.; and CBM Group employees Karen Mock, Resident Manager of Creekside Village Apartments, and Inez Corenevsky, Supervising Property Manager. It is alleged that the respondents were responsible for a discriminatory refusal to rent and discriminatory terms, conditions, privileges, or services and facilities, in violation of Sections 804 (a) and (b) of the Fair Housing Act. The most recent discriminatory act was alleged to have occurred on September 7, 1999. The property is Creekside Village Apartments, 1953 Spruce Drive, Seaside, Oregon. The property is not exempt under the Act.

The respondents receive federal financial assistance from the United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development.

II. COMPLAINANT'S ALLEGATIONS

Ms. Alvera alleged that on August 2, 1999, her husband physically assaulted her in their home, apartment 21 in Creekside Village Apartments. Her husband was jailed and Ms. Alvera obtained a temporary restraining order against him. On August 4, 1999, Ms. Alvera alleged, she received a 24 hour notice to vacate from management that stated that, pursuant to Oregon law: "You, someone in your control, or your pet, has seriously threatened immediately to inflict personal injury, or has inflicted substantial personal injury upon the landlord or other tenants." The notice specified that the incident was the assault on Ms. Alvera by her husband. Ms. Alvera alleged further that after issuing the notice, the managers refused to accept her rent for September. The managers also refused to move her to a one bedroom apartment; since her husband was not to live with her any more, she believed that she no longer qualified for a two bedroom apartment in this USDA subsidized complex. Ms. Alvera alleged that management discriminated against her because of her sex because the way they interpret and enforce Oregon state law toward domestic violence victims has a greater negative impact on women. She also alleged that management would not have treated men the same way as she was treated.

III. RESPONDENTS' DEFENSES

The respondents defended that they gave Ms. Alvera a 24 hour notice to vacate because it is their policy to evict tenants who pose a threat to the safety and well-being of other tenants in the complex. When one person in the household poses a threat, the entire household is evicted.

IV. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The investigation revealed that the subject property consists of forty units and is funded by the USDA Rural Development program. The property is intended to serve lower income residents.

The investigation found that Ms. Alvera and her former husband, Mr. Humberto Mota, signed a lease and moved into a two bedroom unit at the complex in November, 1998. Until the incident from which this complaint arises, Ms. Alvera received no warnings or admonitions concerning her tenancy from the respondents. During this period Mr. Mota assaulted Ms. Alvera, who called the police. However, the respondents apparently were not aware of this incident and no action was taken with respect to their tenancy. In March, 1999, respondent Karen Mock became the resident manager of Creekside Village Apartments.

The evidence shows that on August 2, 1999, at approximately 5:30 am, Mr. Mota physically assaulted Ms. Alvera, causing Ms. Alvera to go to the hospital. Her mother, Tamie Alvera, who resided in unit 30 in the complex, at approximately 6:00 am, went to Ms. Mock in order to get a key to her daughter's apartment so that she could see whether Mr. Mota was still in the apartment. At the time, Tamie Alvera told Ms. Mock that Ms. Alvera had been beaten by Mr. Mota. Ms. Mock wrote up an incident report and sent it to respondent Corenevsky The investigation revealed that immediately after she was released from the hospital, Ms. Alvera obtained a restraining order against her husband, which she showed to Ms. Mock. The restraining order stated that Mr. Mota could not contact Ms. Alvera at her residence, place of business, or within 100 feet of Ms. Alvera and could not contact her by phone or mail. The order also stated that Mr. Mota would move from and not return to their residence. Ms. Alvera discussed with Ms. Mock removing Mr. Mota from the lease.

The investigation revealed further that Ms. Mock was instructed by Ms. Corenevsky to terminate Ms. Alvera's tenancy and issue a 24 hour for cause eviction notice. On August 4, 1999, CBM Group issued a 24 hour notice to Ms. Alvera and Mr. Mota. The notice stated: "You, someone in your control, or your pet, has seriously threatened immediately to inflict personal injury, or has inflicted substantial personal injury upon the landlord or other tenants." The notices specified: "On August 2, 1999 at approximately 6 am. Humberto Mota reportedly physically attacked Tiffani Alvera in their apartment. Subsequently, Police were called in."

The investigation established that on August 4, 1999, Ms. Alvera made an application for a one bedroom unit at the complex because there was then only one member of the household. The evidence shows that this application was rejected by the respondents because of the incident of domestic violence for which Ms. Alvera received the 24 hour notice. The evidence showed that unit 18, a one bedroom apartment into which Ms. Alvera eventually moved, was available as of August 4, 1999. On October 8, 1999, Ms. Alvera submitted a second application for a one bedroom apartment. On November 2, Ms. Alvera signed a lease for a one bedroom apartment, where she resided until she was later evicted for reasons not directly related to the allegations of this complaint.

The evidence further revealed that on August 6, 1999, Ms. Mock refused to accept Ms. Alvera's rent for the month of August. The respondents communicated to Ms. Alvera up through early September, 1999 that they intended to pursue an FED action against her. On October 26, 1999, an attorney representing the respondents wrote Ms. Alvera "concerning your Rental Agreement of [unit 21]." The letter stated:

> "As you know, there was a recent incident of violence that took place between you and another member of your household. It is our understanding that you have taken steps to ensure that such an incident will not occur again.
>
> This letter is to advise that Creekside is very concerned about the effect of such conduct on other tenants of the premises. Your conduct and the conduct of the other tenant would probably have been grounds for termination of your tenancy. Obviously, Creekside would not desire to take this action.
>
> This letter is to advise that if there is any type of reoccurrence of the past events described above, that Creekside would have not other alternative but to cause an eviction to take place. We solicit your cooperation in continuing to maintain a restraining order or for you to take whatever action is necessary to make certain that the rules of your tenancy are followed."

There is no dispute that the sole reason for the 24 hour notice was respondents' response to this incident of domestic violence. The evidence shows that none of the other tenants complained to the respondents that their tenancy had been disrupted or that they had been injured or feared injury because of the incident. Ms. Mock stated that after Ms. Alvera vacated the apartment a hole in the wall, which might have been caused by an assault by Mr. Mota, was discovered, but that she learned of this damage long after the 24 hour notice had been issued and that she did not report the hole to her superiors.

The investigation did not establish that Ms. Alvera was treated differently than similarly situated male tenants. There were no similarly situated male tenants. The evidence also

revealed that there were at least three incidents of domestic violence at Creekside Village Apartments, all involving female victims, but respondents knew only about the August, 1999 incident involving Ms. Alvera. The evidence showed that the respondents issued three other 24 hour notices. One notice was for criminal activity, one was because the INS took the entire family away, and one was because a tenant threatened other tenants with a baseball bat. The evidence also showed that the resident manager filed six incident reports with upper management during the period June 1, 1999 to January 31, 2000. The only incident report involving violence, domestic or otherwise, was that involving Ms. Alvera.

It is the respondents' policy, expressed by respondent Corenevsky, that where there is any threat or act of violence by a tenant or their guest, the household is terminated. She stated that the subject property has a "zero tolerance" for violence or threats of violence, and this policy was affirmed by the ADA/504 Coordinator for CBM Group. Ms. Corenevsky stated: "As is often the case in a domestic violence situation the victim does not take steps to prevent a reoccurrence of violent acts, subjecting other tenants to witness the scene play out time and time again. The reasons we take such a hard stance on the issue of violence is to maintain a peaceful living environment for all tenants."

Nationally, each year from 1992 to 1996 about 8 in 1,000 women and 1 in 1,000 men experienced a violent victimization by an intimate—a current or former spouse, girlfriend or boyfriend. National statistics also showed that, although less likely than males to experience violent crime overall, females are 5 to 8 times more likely than males to be victimized by an intimate. Other national studies have found that women are as much as ten times more likely than men to be victimized by an intimate.

National statistics show that 90% to 95% of victims of domestic violence are women. National estimates are that at least one million women a year are victims of domestic violence. A 1998 Oregon Domestic Violence Needs Assessment stated that more than one in eight (13.3 %) women in the state were the victims of physical abuse by an intimate in the prior year. Evidence obtained during the investigation showed that 93% of the victims of domestic violence reported to Clatsop County in 1999 were women. The 1998 Oregon Domestic Violence Needs Assessment compared the Oregon statistics to national statistics on the prevalence of domestic violence and found them to be comparable. National studies using a similar methodology reported that 1 out of every 9 to 1 out of every 12 women had been victims of physical assault by an intimate partner within the previous year. This compares to the Oregon study's finding that 1 of every 10 Oregon women have been victims of physical assault.

These statistics demonstrate that the respondents' policy of evicting all members of a household because of an incident of domestic violence, regardless of whether the household member is a victim or a perpetrator of the domestic violence, has an adverse impact based on sex, because of the disproportionate number of women victims of domestic violence.

The respondents have raised several reasons for their policy. One rationale advanced by the respondents is the need to protect other tenants both from threats of violence or violence and from being disturbed in their tenancy. However, the evidence fails to support this rationale. In the case of Ms. Alvera, no other tenants complained about the incident in question and the evidence shows that the only tenant who was aware of the incident was Ms. Alvera's mother. There were no other records of tenant complaints or incident reports involving domestic violence though the evidence shows that incidents of domestic violence were occurring at the complex. Further, there was no evidence in the investigation to support an assumption that there is a greater probability that persons living in the immediate vicinity of a household that has incidents of domestic violence will themselves become victims of that violence.

The respondents also argued that their policy is consistent with and mandated by rules of Rural Development concerning properties funded by that agency. Rural Development has implemented regulations and procedures providing that: "Action or conduct of the tenant or member which disrupts the livability of the project by being a direct threat to the health or safety of any person, or the right of any tenant or member to the quiet enjoyment of the premises..." is grounds for termination of tenancy. However, Rural Development's rules and policies also provide: "It is not the intent that this provision of material lease violation apply to innocent members of the tenant's household who are not engaged in the illegal activity, nor are responsible for control of another household member or guest." The Rural Development representative responsible for monitoring Creekside Village Apartments stated that the rule protects innocent parties.

Respondent Corenevsky also stated that a reason that the respondents evict the entire household is because a TRO doesn't stop violence, and many men are not afraid of TROs. The results of national studies on the effectiveness of restraining orders in preventing future incidents of domestic violence are mixed. One study showed that in the six months after a restraining order is issued, 65% of the women who obtained the order reported no further domestic violence problems. Another study showed that future incidents of violence did occur even after a restraining order was obtained. However, the respondents' rationale is based on overbroad generalizations that do not take into account either the individual circumstances of the female victim tenant or all of the actions that she may have taken to prevent a recurrence of the violence. For example, in the case of Ms. Alvera, Mr. Mota was jailed, apparently subsequently left the country, and has had no further contact with Ms. Alvera.

In issuing a 24 hour notice, the respondents apparently also were relying on an Oregon State law, ORS 90.400(3), which permits landlords to issue a notice for a tenant to vacate the property within 24 hours if there is substantial personal injury to the landlord or other tenants. However, that law, and the legislative history behind it, were not intended to apply to innocent victims of violence. During the legislative process witnesses testified that: "There are special concerns about battered women who might be evicted under this provision because of the outrageous conduct of an abusive boyfriend; they would be punished twice; beaten by the boyfriend, then evicted because of the boyfriend's abuse."

The evidence taken as a whole establishes that a policy of evicting innocent victims of domestic violence because of that violence has a disproportionate adverse impact on women and is not supported by a valid business or health or safety reason by the respondents.

V. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the Department finds reasonable cause to believe that the complainant has been discriminated against because of her sex in violation of the Fair Housing Act. A copy of the Final Investigative Report is available by requesting the Report in writing addressed to the Fair Housing Hub, Northwest/Alaska Area, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 909 First Avenue, Suite 205, Seattle, Washington 98104.

4/13/01
Date

Judith A. Keeler
Director, Seattle Fair Housing Hub