



Quarterly eNewsletter

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Chair's Column

Dear Colleagues,

I am honored to bring you this edition of the Commission's eNewsletter, focusing on the critical issue of access to housing for victims of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children in the United States. Nearly half (50%) of the 24 cities surveyed in 2005 by the US Conference of Mayors identified domestic violence as a "primary cause" of homelessness. Ninety-two percent (92%) of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives¹ and 63% have been victims of domestic violence as adults.² Currently, 38% of domestic violence victims have become homeless at some point in their lives.³

¹ A. Browne & S. Bassuk, "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; A. Browne, "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.

² *Id.*

³ Charlene K. Baker et al., "Domestic Violence and Housing Problems: A Contextual Analysis of Women's Help-Seeking, Received Informal Support, and Formal System Response," *Violence Against Women* 9(7) (2003): 754-783.

Domestic violence leads to homelessness in direct and indirect ways: evictions because of the numerous visits to the apartment by police, or destruction of property by the perpetrator; denial of housing to individuals with protection order or coming from shelters; denial of requests for early lease release when the victim wishes to leave to flee the violence; and other similar threats of penalties and evictions in both public and private housing situations. Thus, advocacy for the housing rights of domestic violence victims is essential.

We are extremely fortunate to have articles for this eNewsletter written by national experts on the housing rights of victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, designed to provide practical information on how to effectively advocate for the housing rights of victims in both public and private housing. Our first article is by Emily J. Martin, Deputy Director of the American Civil Liberties Union Women's Rights Project, and Deborah A. Widiss, Staff Attorney at Legal Momentum with principal responsibilities for its Employment and Housing Rights for Victims of Domestic Violence Project. This article provides an essential overview of state and federal laws that provide protections for victims of domestic violence in private housing. Then, Naomi S. Stern, until recently, manager of the Domestic Violence Program at the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, contributes an invaluable overview of the new protections for victims of domestic violence and stalking in public housing in the Violence Against Women Act of 2005. Finally, Emily and Deborah have provided a list of strategies for attorneys representing victims of domestic violence regarding their housing needs. Together, these articles provide a comprehensive resource on housing rights and access to housing for victims of domestic violence that we hope will prove useful in your practice.

As always, the Commission welcomes information from you regarding resources or promising practices in advocating for the housing accessibility for victims of domestic violence. Our heartfelt thanks to all of you for your work on behalf of survivors and their children.

The Honorable Pamila Brown
Chair, ABA Commission on Domestic Violence

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