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## **Notice to Housing Choice Voucher Participants Regarding the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)**

A federal law that went into effect in 2006 protects individuals who are victims of domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. The name of the law is the Violence Against Women Act, or “VAWA.” This notice summarizes the Houston Housing Authority’s policies and your rights under VAWA.

### **Protections for Victims**

If you are eligible for a housing choice voucher (Section 8), the Houston Housing Authority will not deny you assistance just because you are a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking. Also, a Section 8 landlord cannot refuse to rent to you solely because you are a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking. If you are the victim of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking, you cannot be terminated from the Section 8 program or evicted based on acts or threats of violence committed against you. Also, criminal acts directly related to the domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking that are caused by a member of your household or a guest can’t be the reason for evicting you or terminating your rental assistance if you were the victim of the abuse.

### **Confidentiality**

The Houston Housing Authority and your landlord must keep confidential any information you provide about the violence against you, unless:

- You give written permission to the Houston Housing Authority or your landlord to release the information.
- Your landlord needs to use the information in an eviction proceeding, such as to evict your abuser.
- A law requires the Houston Housing Authority or your landlord to release the information.

You should inform the Houston Housing Authority if your safety will be placed at risk if the Agency discloses information about the violence against you.

### **Proving that You Are a Victim of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, or Stalking**

The Houston Housing Authority and your landlord can ask you to prove or “certify” that you are a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking. There are three ways you can prove that you are a victim:

- Complete the certification form given to you by the Houston Housing Authority or your landlord. The form will ask for your name, the name of your abuser, the abuser’s relationship to you, the date, time, and location of the incident of violence, and a description of the violence.
- Provide a statement from a victim service provider, attorney, or medical professional who has helped you address incidents of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking. The professional must state that he or she believes that the incidents of abuse are real. Both you and the professional must sign the statement, and both of you must state that you are signing “under penalty of perjury.”
- Provide a police or court record, such as a protective order.

If you are requested by the Houston Housing Authority, or a Section 8 owner, to provide verification, you 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.

### **Removing the Abuser from the Household**

Your landlord may evict a tenant who has committed criminal acts of violence against you, your family members or others, while allowing you and the other members of your household to stay in the unit. Also, the Houston Housing Authority can terminate the abuser's rental assistance while allowing you to continue to receive assistance. If your landlord or the Houston Housing Authority chooses to remove the abuser, they cannot take away the remaining tenants' rights to the unit or otherwise punish the remaining tenants.

### **Moving to Protect Your Safety**

The Houston Housing Authority may permit you to move and still keep your rental assistance, even if your current lease has not yet expired. The Houston Housing Authority may require that you be current on your rent or other obligations in the Section 8 program. The Houston Housing Authority may also ask you to provide proof that you are moving because of incidences of abuse.

### **Reasons You Can Be Evicted or Your Voucher Can Be Terminated**

You can be evicted and terminating your rental assistance can be terminated if the Houston Housing Authority or your landlord can show that not evicting you and terminating your assistance creates a real and immediate threat to your neighbors, landlord or Houston Housing Authority staff. Also, you can be evicted and your rental assistance can be terminated for serious or repeated lease violations that are not related to the acts of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking committed against you.

### **VAWA and Other Laws**

VAWA does not limit the Houston Housing Authority or your landlord's duty to honor court orders about access to or control of the property. This includes orders issued to protect the victim and orders dividing property among household members in cases where a household breaks up. VAWA does not replace any federal, state, or local law that provides greater protection for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking.

### **For Additional Information**

If you would like additional information about the Houston Housing Authority's VAWA Policy, you may obtain the complete VAWA Policy on HHA's website at [www.housingforhouston.com](http://www.housingforhouston.com)

For help and advice on escaping an abusive relationship, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).