

## **Notice to MRVP Applicants and Participants Regarding Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)**

This sample notice was adapted from a notice prepared by the National Housing Law Project.

A federal law that went into effect in 2006 protects individuals who are victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The name of the law is the Violence against Women Act, or "VAWA." This notice explains your rights under VAWA.

### **Protections for Victims**

If you are eligible for a Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) voucher, the AA cannot deny you rental assistance solely because you are a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

If you are the victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, you cannot be terminated from the MRVP or evicted based on acts or threats of violence committed against you. Also, criminal acts directly related to the domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, 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.

### **Reasons You Can Be Evicted**

You can be evicted and your rental assistance can be terminated if the AA or your landlord can show there is an actual and imminent (immediate) threat to other tenants or employees at the property if you remain in your housing. Also, you can be evicted and your rental assistance can be terminated for serious or repeated lease violations that are not related to the domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking committed against you. The AA and your landlord cannot hold you to a more demanding set of rules than it applies to tenants who are not victims.

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

Your landlord may split the lease to evict a tenant who has committed criminal activity directly relating to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking against an affiliated individual or other individual, while allowing the victim and other household members to stay in the assisted unit. Also, the AA can terminate the abuser's MRVP rental assistance while allowing you to continue to receive assistance. If the landlord or AA chooses to remove the abuser, it may not take away the remaining tenants' rights to the unit or otherwise punish the remaining tenants. In removing the abuser from the household, your landlord must follow federal, state, and local eviction procedures.

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

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

## **Proving That You Are a Victim of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault or Stalking**

The AA and your landlord can ask you to prove or “certify” that you are a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. The AA or your landlord must give you at least 14 business days (i.e., Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays do not count) to provide this proof. The AA and your landlord are free to extend the deadline. There are three ways you can prove that you are a victim:

- Complete the certification form given to you by the AA 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, sexual assault, 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 fail to provide one of these documents within the required time, the landlord may evict you, and the AA may terminate your rental assistance.

### **Confidentiality**

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

- You give written permission to the AA 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 AA or your landlord to release the information.

If release of the information would put your safety at risk, you should inform the AA and your landlord.

### **VAWA and Other Laws**

VAWA does not limit the AA’s or your landlord’s duty to honor court orders about access to or control of the property... his includes orders issued to protect a victim and orders dividing property among household members in cases where a family breaks up.

VAWA does not replace any federal, state, or local law that provides greater protection for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

### **For Additional Information**

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). You may also contact:

Casa Myrna  
38 Wareham St., Boston, MA 02118  
(617) 521-0100

HAWC  
27 Congress St #204, Salem, MA 01970  
Lynn, MA: (781) 592-9900

Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center  
2 Harris St., Newburyport, MA 01950 (978)  
465-0999

### **Definitions**

For purposes of determining whether a tenant may be covered by VAWA, the following list of definitions applies:

VAWA defines domestic violence to include felony or misdemeanor crimes of violence committed by any of the following:

- A current or former spouse of the victim;
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- A person with whom the victim shares a child in common;
- A person who is cohabitating with or has cohabitated with the victim as a spouse;
- A person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction receiving grant monies; or
- Any other person against an adult or youth victim who is protected from that person's acts under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction.

VAWA defines dating violence as violence committed by a person (1) who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim AND (2) where the existence of such a relationship shall be determined based on a consideration of the following factors:

- The length of the relationship;
- The type of relationship;
- The frequency of interaction between the persons involved in the relationship.

VAWA defines sexual assault as any nonconsensual sexual act proscribed by Federal, tribal, or State law, including when the victim lacks capacity to consent (42 U.S.C. 13925(a)).

VAWA defines stalking as (A)(i) to follow, pursue, or repeatedly commit acts with the intent to kill, injure, harass, or intimidate another person OR (ii) to place under surveillance with the intent to kill, injure, harass, or intimidate another person AND (B) in the course of, or as a result of, such following, pursuit, surveillance, or repeatedly committed acts, to place a person in reasonable fear of the death of, or serious bodily injury to, or to cause substantial emotional harm to (i) that person, (ii) a member of the immediate family of that person, or (iii) the spouse or intimate partner of that person.

## Certification of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking Form

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**Purpose of Form:** The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 (“VAWA”) protects qualified tenants, participants, and applicants, and affiliated individuals, who are victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking from being denied housing assistance, evicted, or terminated from housing assistance based on acts of such violence against them.

**Use of Form:** This is an optional form. A housing agency, owner, or manager presented with a claim for continued or initial tenancy or assistance based on status as a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking (herein referred to as “Victim”) has the option to request that the victim document or provide written evidence to demonstrate that the violence occurred. The Victim has the option of either submitting this form or submitting third-party documentation, such as:

1. A record of a Federal, State, tribal, territorial, or local law enforcement agency (e.g. police), court, or administrative agency; or
2. Documentation signed by the Victim and signed by an employee, agent or volunteer of a victim service provider, an attorney, a medical professional, or a mental health professional from whom the Victim has sought assistance relating to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, or the effects of abuse, in which the professional attests under penalty of perjury (28 U.S.C. 1746) that he or she believes that the incident of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking is grounds for protection under 24 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 5.2005 or 24 CFR § 5.2009.

If this form is used by the Victim, the Victim must complete and submit it within 14 business days of receiving it from the housing agency, owner, or manager. This form must be returned to the person and address specified in the written request for the certification. If the Victim does not complete and return this form (or provide third-party verification) by the 14th business day or by an extension of the date provided by the housing agency, manager, or owner, the Victim cannot be assured s/he will receive VAWA protections.

If the Victim submits this form or third-party documentation as listed above, the housing agency, owner, or manager cannot require any additional evidence from the Victim.

**Confidentiality:** All information provided to a housing agency, owner or manager concerning the incident(s) of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking relating to the Victim (including the fact that an individual is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking) shall be kept confidential by the housing agency, owner, or manager, and such information shall not be entered into any shared database. Employees of the housing agency, owner, or manager are not to have access to these details unless to afford or reject VAWA protections to the Victim; and may not disclose this information to any other entity or individual, except to the extent that disclosure is: (i) requested or consented to by the Victim in writing; (ii) required for use in an eviction proceeding; or (iii) otherwise required by applicable law.

**AA Use:** Date Written Request Received by Victim: \_\_\_\_\_

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**To be completed by the Victim of Domestic Violence,  
Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, or Stalking Victim**

Name of Victim: \_\_\_\_\_

Names of Other Household Members Listed on Lease:

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Perpetrator\*: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Note:** The Victim is required to provide the name of the perpetrator only if the name of the perpetrator is safe to provide and is known to the victim.

Date(s) the Incident(s) of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, or Stalking Occurred:

\_\_\_\_\_

Location of Incident(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**Description of Incident(s)**

This description may be used by the housing agency, owner, or manager for purposes of evicting the perpetrator. Please be as descriptive as possible. Please attach additional sheets of paper as necessary

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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I hereby certify that the information that I have provided is true and correct and I believe that, based on the information I have provided, that I am a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking. I acknowledge that submission of false information is a basis for denial of admission, termination of assistance, or eviction.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Executed on (Date): \_\_\_\_\_