

**5-Year PHA Plan
Mississippi Regional Housing Authority IV
ATTACHMENT 3
Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Goals (B.4)**

The following synopsis describes the PHA’s goals, activities, objectives, policies, and programs that will enable the PHA to serve the needs of child and adult victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking:

Purpose and Applicability

The purpose of the Authority’s *Violence Against Women Act Policy* (“Policy”) is to implement the applicable provisions of the Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Act of 2013 (“VAWA”), as amended and generally set forth the Mississippi Regional Housing Authority IV’s (“PHA”) policies and procedures regarding domestic violence, dating violence sexual assault, and stalking, as hereinafter defined.

The Policy is applicable to all federally subsidized housing and Section 8 rental assistance programs administered by the PHA.

Goals and Objectives

The main objective of the Policy to maintain compliance with all applicable legal requirements of VAWA. In order to assure such compliance, training of appropriate staff managing the PHA’s housing developments regarding the Policy is imperative. The PHA will seek to respond in accordance with the Policy to reported incidents of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, including but not limited to providing housing opportunities for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

Definitions

As used in VAWA:

The term *affiliated individual* means, with respect to a person:

- A spouse, parent, brother or sister, or child of that individual, or an individual to whom that individual stands in the position or place of a parent; or
- Any individual, tenant or lawful occupant living in the household of that individual.

The term *bifurcate* means, with respect to a public housing or Section 8 lease, to divide a lease as a matter of law such that certain tenants can be evicted or removed while the remaining family members’ lease and occupancy rights are allowed to remain intact.

The term *dating violence* means violence committed by a person who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim; and 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

The term *domestic violence* includes felony or misdemeanor crimes of violence committed by a current or former spouse of the victim, by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, by a person who is cohabitating with or has cohabitated with the victim as a spouse, by a person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction receiving grant monies, or by 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.

The term *sexual assault* means:

- Any nonconsensual sexual act proscribed by Federal, tribal, or State law, including when the victim lacks the capacity to consent

The term *stalking* means:

- To follow, pursue, or repeatedly commit acts with the intent to kill, injure, harass, or intimidate; or

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- To place under surveillance with the intent to kill, injure, harass, or intimidate another person; and
- 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 (1) that person, (2) a member of the immediate family of that person, or (3) the spouse or intimate partner of that person.

Confidentiality

All information provided to the PHA regarding domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, including the fact that an individual is a victim of such violence or stalking, must be retained in confidence. This means that the PHA (1) may not enter the information into any shared database, (2) may not allow employees or others to access the information unless they are explicitly authorized to do so and have a need to know the information for purposes of their work, and (3) may not provide the information to any other entity or individual, except to the extent that the disclosure is (a) requested or consented to by the individual in writing, (b) required for use in an eviction proceeding, or (c) otherwise required by applicable law.

PHA Policy

If disclosure is required for use in an eviction proceeding or is otherwise required by applicable law, the PHA will inform the victim before disclosure occurs so that safety risks can be identified and addressed.

Verification of Victim Status

If presented with a claim for initial or continued assistance based on status as a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, or criminal activity related to any of these forms of abuse the PHA may—but is not required to—request that the individual making the claim document the abuse. Any request for documentation must be in writing, and the individual must be allowed at least 14 business days after receipt of the request to submit the documentation. The PHA may extend this time period at its discretion. [24 CFR 5.2007(a)]

The individual may satisfy the PHA's request by providing any one of the following three forms of documentation [24 CFR 5.2007(b)]:

- 1) A completed and signed HUD-approved certification form (HUD-50066, Certification of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, or Stalking), which must include the name of the perpetrator only if the name of the perpetrator is safe to provide and is known to the victim.
- 2) A federal, state, tribal, territorial, or local police report or court record.
- 3) Documentation signed by a person who has assisted the victim in addressing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, or the effects of such abuse. This person may be an employee, agent, or volunteer of a victim service provider; an attorney; or a medical professional. Acceptable documentation also includes a record of an administrative agency, and documentation from a mental health professional. The person signing the documentation must attest under penalty of perjury to the person's belief that the incidents in question are bona fide incidents of abuse. The victim must also sign the documentation.

The PHA may not require third-party documentation (forms 2 and 3) in addition to certification (form 1), except as specified below under "Conflicting Documentation," nor may it require certification in addition to third-party documentation [VAWA final rule].

PHA Policy

Any request for documentation of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking will specify a deadline of 14 business days following receipt of the request, will describe the three forms of acceptable documentation, will provide explicit instructions on where and to whom the documentation must be submitted, and will state the consequences for failure to submit the documentation or request an extension in writing by the deadline.

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The PHA may, in its discretion, extend the deadline for 10 business days. Any extension granted by the PHA will be in writing.

Admission and Screening

VAWA and the HUD regulation at 24 CFR 5.2005(b) prohibits PHAs from denying admission to an otherwise qualified applicant on the basis that the applicant is or has been a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

Definitions of key terms used in VAWA are in the PHA's Admission and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOP) where general VAWA requirements and policies pertaining to notification, documentation, and confidentiality are also located.

Notification

VAWA (2013) expanded notification requirements to include the obligation for PHAs to provide applicants who are denied assistance with a notice of rights and the form HUD-50066 at the time the applicant is denied.

PHA Policy

The PHA acknowledges that a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking may have an unfavorable history (e.g. a poor credit history, a record of previous damage to an apartment, a prior arrest record) that would warrant denial under the PHA's policies. Therefore, if the PHA makes a determination to deny admission to an applicant family, the PHA will include in its notice of denial information about the protection against denial provided by VAWA in accordance with the PHA's ACOP as well as including a copy of the form HUD-50066. The PHA will request that an applicant wishing to claim this protection notify the PHA within 10 business days.

Documentation

Victim Documentation [24 CFR 5.2007]

PHA Policy

If an applicant claims the protection against denial of admission that VAWA provides to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, the PHA will request in writing that the applicant provide documentation supporting the claim in accordance with the PHA's ACOP.

Perpetrator Documentation

PHA Policy

If the perpetrator of the abuse is a member of the applicant family, the applicant must provide additional documentation consisting of one of the following:

- A signed statement (1) requesting that the perpetrator be removed from the application and (2) certifying that the perpetrator will not be permitted to visit or to stay as a guest in the public housing unit.
- Documentation that the perpetrator has successfully completed, or is successfully undergoing, rehabilitation or treatment. The documentation must be signed by an employee or agent of a domestic violence service provider or by a medical or other knowledgeable professional from whom the perpetrator has sought or is receiving assistance in addressing the abuse. The signer must attest under penalty of perjury to his or her belief that the rehabilitation was successfully completed or is progressing successfully. The victim and perpetrator must also sign or attest to the documentation.

Termination of Tenancy or Assistance

This section addresses the protections against termination of tenancy that the VAWA provides for public housing residents who are victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. For general VAWA

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requirements and PHA policies pertaining to notification, documentation, and confidentiality see the PHA's ACOP, where definitions of key VAWA terms are also located.

VAWA Protections against Termination [24 CFR 5.2005(c)]

VAWA provides that "criminal activity directly related to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, engaged in by a member of a tenant's household or any guest or other person under the tenant's control, shall not be cause for termination of tenancy of, occupancy rights of, or assistance to the victim, if the tenant or affiliated individual of the tenant is the victim" [24 CFR 5.2005(c)(2)].

VAWA further provides that incidents of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking may not be construed either as serious or repeated violations of the lease by the victim of such violence or as good cause for terminating the tenancy or occupancy rights of the victim of such violence [24 CFR 5.2005(c)(1)].

VAWA and Other Laws [Pub.L. 109-162]

VAWA does not supersede any other federal, state, or local law that provides greater protection to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking.

Moreover, VAWA does not limit the PHA's duty to honor court orders issued to protect a victim or to address the distribution of property when a family breaks up.

Limits on VAWA Protections [24 CFR 5.2005(d) and (e)]

While VAWA prohibits a PHA from using domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking as the cause for a termination or eviction action against a public housing tenant who is the victim of the abuse, the protections it provides are not absolute. Specifically:

- VAWA does not limit a PHA's otherwise available authority to terminate assistance to or evict a victim for lease violations not premised on an act of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking providing that the PHA does not subject the victim to a more demanding standard than the standard to which it holds other tenants.
- VAWA does not limit a PHA's authority to terminate the tenancy of any public housing tenant if the PHA can demonstrate an actual and imminent threat to other tenants or those employed at or providing service to the property if that tenant's tenancy is not terminated.

HUD regulations define *actual and imminent threat* to mean words, gestures, actions, or other indicators of a physical threat that (a) is real, (b) would occur within an immediate time frame, and (c) could result in death or serious bodily harm [24 CFR 5.2005(d)(2) and (e)]. In determining whether an individual would pose an actual and imminent threat, the factors to be considered include:

- The duration of the risk
- The nature and severity of the potential harm
- The likelihood that the potential harm will occur
- The length of time before the potential harm would occur [24 CFR 5.2005(e)]

Transfer

PHA Policy

The PHA will consider the following as high priority transfer request:

- When there has been a verified threat of physical harm or criminal activity. Such circumstances may, at the PHA's discretion, include an assessment by law enforcement indicating that a family member is the actual or potential victim of a criminal attack, retaliation for testimony, a hate crime, or domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

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Relationship with Service Providers

The PHA will cooperate with organizations and entities, both private and governmental which provide shelter and/or services to domestic violence victims. If PHA staff becomes aware that an assisted individual is a victim of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking the PHA will refer the victim to a shelter or other service provider as appropriate. This policy does not create any legal obligation requiring the PHA either to maintain a relationship with any particular shelter or service provider to victims of domestic violence or to make a referral in any particular case.

Notification

Notification to Applicants and Tenants [24 CFR 5.2005(a)(1)]

The PHA will inform public housing applicants and tenants of their rights under VAWA, including their right to confidentiality and the limits thereof, when they are denied assistance, when they are admitted to the program, and when they are notified of an eviction or termination of housing benefits.

PHA Policy

The PHA will provide all applicants with information about VAWA at the time they request an application for housing assistance. The PHA will also include such information in all notices of denial of assistance.

The PHA will provide all tenants with information about VAWA at the time of admission and at annual reexamination. The PHA will also include such information in all lease termination notices.

The VAWA information provided to applicants and tenants will consist of the notice and a copy of form HUD-50066, *Certification of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking*.

The PHA is not limited to providing VAWA information at the times specified in the above policy. If the PHA decides to provide VAWA information to a tenant following an incident of domestic violence, *Notice PIH 2006-42* cautions against sending the information by mail, since the abuser may be monitoring the mail. The notice recommends that in such cases the PHA make alternative delivery arrangements that will not put the victim at risk.

PHA Policy

Whenever the PHA has reason to suspect that providing information about VAWA to a public housing tenant might place a victim of domestic violence at risk, it will attempt to deliver the information by hand directly to the victim.

Relationship with other Applicable Laws

VAWA does not supersede any other federal, state, or local law that provides greater protection to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking. Moreover, VAWA does not limit the PHA's duty to honor court orders issued to protect a victim or to address the distribution of property when a family breaks up.