



PROHIBIT DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES AGAINST VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE WITH REGARD TO HOUSING

Bills: A.9024 and S.3784

NYSPAC Position: SUPPORT

The New York State Public Affairs Committee (NYSPAC) of the Junior League supports the enactment of legislation that would prohibit housing discrimination against victims of domestic violence (DV). Currently the New York State legislature is considering two bills that would address this issue: A.9024 and S.3784. **These bills aim to include victims of DV as a protected class in the housing provisions of the Human Rights Law, allowing the State to ensure that they will not be prevented from obtaining or maintaining housing as a result of their status as victims of domestic violence.**

Alarming, victims of domestic and sexual violence and their families across the country are being discriminated against, denied access to, and even evicted from private housing because of their status as victims of domestic violence or the abuse perpetrated against them. Landlords frequently turn away victims who have protection orders or other indications of their status as victims of domestic violence. Victims have been threatened with penalties or evictions or unfairly held accountable for the behavior of their abusers. Consequently, victims refrain from calling law enforcement if they are in danger because they are concerned that they will be evicted. Some advocates advise battered women not to seek protection orders because in doing so, they may place their housing in peril.

Domestic violence is a crime of enormous magnitude that affects all New Yorkers regardless of age, race, or economic status—with long term and pervasive consequences for victims, families, communities and society. Annually, it is estimated that:

- 400,000 domestic violence incidents are reported to law enforcement in New York
- 300,000 calls are received by hotlines throughout the State
- 165,000 orders of protection were issued in domestic violence cases in family, criminal and supreme courts (2007)

Battered women who live in poverty are often forced to choose between abusive relationships and homelessness as few safeguards have existed to prevent housing discrimination. In a 1999 study conducted by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 67% of DV service providers cited housing discrimination as a barrier to battered women seeking alternative housing. In 2005, 50% of the cities surveyed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors identified DV as a primary cause of homelessness. Approximately 63% of homeless women have experienced DV in their adult lives (Network to End Domestic Violence).

Although homelessness can occur for a number of reasons, these statistics make clear that DV is a dominant factor. Secure housing and employment are often the most important resources a DV victim needs in order to stay safe. Often, it can be challenging for victims to obtain and maintain housing as they may be viewed by landlords as problem tenants due solely to the abuse they suffered at the hands of another. **Victims of domestic violence often return to their abusers because they cannot find long-term housing.**

Whereas the Violence Against Women Act of 2005 and its subsequent reauthorization bill, currently debated in the federal legislature, address and provide for protection against discrimination in federal public and Section 8 housing, **no safeguards are in place against discrimination in private housing.** Given the shortage of public and subsidized housing in New York and because of the transient nature of shelters – where for many the maximum stay is 60 days -- many DV victims seek refuge in the private housing market where they are sometimes met with landlords' assumptions about the negative effect their tenancy may have on property or other persons. **The provisions of bills A.9024 and S.3784 bridge this gap by ensuring that DV victims and property owners have clear notice of their legally binding rights and responsibilities.**

On behalf of more than 8,000 women represented by the 18 Junior Leagues of New York State, we urge you to support fair housing practices and safeguards for victims of DV to ensure that they are protected, not punished, for being subjected to the suffering that results from domestic violence. **For more information, please contact NYSPAC at info@jl-nyspac.org.**

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