



## NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



### **For Immediate Release**

## The Equal Rights Center Releases New Report Tying Domestic Violence to Homelessness

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 22, 2008 – Today the Equal Rights Center (ERC) – a non-profit civil rights organization – released a critical new report that sheds light on the discrimination that survivors of domestic violence face when searching for housing in the District of Columbia.

The report examines whether, and to what extent, domestic violence survivors in the District were subjected to discriminatory treatment when inquiring about available rental properties. Discriminatory treatment was defined as being denied housing (both outright and indirectly), or being offered adverse terms and conditions in order to obtain housing.

The study found that 65 percent of test applicants associated with domestic violence were subjected to at least one form of discriminatory treatment. Of that statistic, 9 percent of test applicants associated with domestic violence were denied housing outright or had housing made unavailable to them – something that *never* happened to test applicants who were not associated with domestic violence. The other 56 percent of test applicants associated with domestic violence were subjected to adverse terms and conditions.

One of the most serious problems that domestic violence survivors face is discrimination in housing, which ultimately can lead to homelessness. In fact, domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women in the United States. Landlords sometimes evict or refuse to rent to individuals because they mistakenly think their abusers pose a threat to the property or other tenants.

In 2007, the D.C. City Council enacted cutting-edge legislation to provide survivors of domestic violence with the most progressive protections in the country against housing discrimination. The *Protection from Discriminatory Eviction for Victims of Domestic Violence Amendment Act of 2006* protects survivors of domestic violence in at least three important ways: first, from being denied housing because of a current or past history of domestic abuse; second, from being evicted if a domestic violence incident occurs after they have found housing; and third, by being allowed to terminate their lease without penalty if they need to flee an abusive situation.

The ERC began its investigation in January 2008 to determine the rate at which housing providers in the District were complying with this new law.

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“This is shameful! The folks who are among the most vulnerable in our community get victimized twice: once by their assailants and then when they try to find housing away from their assailants,” said Rabbi Bruce E. Kahn, Executive Director of the Equal Rights Center.

“We have always known that there is frequent discrimination against victims of domestic violence in the housing rental market, but, until now, we have not had hard statistics,” said Katherine Zeisel, the Domestic Violence Program Staff Attorney at the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. “This report provides organizations like ours with an important tool as we advocate with national and state policymakers, work with advocates and develop new legal strategies to ensure better housing protections for victims of domestic violence.”

In addition to issuing the report, the ERC is partnering with the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and the D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence to launch an educational campaign about the new DC law. The ERC and these two organizations will host several free trainings in the spring and early summer for domestic violence and housing program audiences, housing attorneys, landlords, and property management companies.

“When we worked to pass the law, we were fortunate to have the support of lawmakers that understood the injustice facing victims of domestic violence,” said Ken Noyes, Executive Director of the D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence. “There is still much to do. Many victims are still being discriminated against. This law provides significant protections to victims and we must continue to partner with the District government and other stakeholders to ensure legal compliance and continued education and training.”

*For a full copy of the ERC’s report, go to <http://www.equalrightscenter.org/> and click on Publications, Studies & Research.*

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