



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

Senator Klein Introduces New Legislation That Provides Victims of Domestic Violence Equal Access to Public Housing

JEFFREY D. KLEIN December 15, 2014

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**New York State
Senator Shirley L. Huntley**

Assistant Minority Leader for Intergovernmental Affairs

Invites you to attend a series of workshops on

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**For Women,
Men, Teenagers,
and Children**

Current New York City Housing Authority Ranking System Places Homeless Families First In Line For Public Housing; Thousands of Domestic Violence Victims Inadvertently Displaced Due to Unfair Priority System

BRONX, NY - New York State Senator and Independent Democratic Conference leader Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester), alongside Assemblyman Luis Sepúlveda (D-Bronx), New York City Council Member Ritchie Torres (CD-15), housing advocates, women's rights activists and

victims of domestic violence, today announced the introduction of new legislation that would create an equal priority system for all homeless women, children and families across New York City. The proposal comes on the heels of shocking revelations that victims of domestic violence do not qualify for priority placement in the New York City Public Housing Authority (“NYCHA”) system, while at the same time, incidents of domestic violence across the five boroughs have increased dramatically in the past year.

Senator Jeff Klein, said: “Without a doubt, homelessness in New York is a growing problem, but giving certain homeless populations priority over others is simply not the answer. Let’s be clear, victims of domestic violence are homeless – these people are fleeing their homes with nowhere to turn. It is simply unacceptable that any person who has suffered injury as a result of domestic violence is not afforded equal access to public housing and the safe haven that they deserve. In the coming weeks and months, I look forward to working with my partners in Albany and passing this important piece of legislation to reform a grossly unfair system that has been outdated for many years.”

In order to determine eligibility for public housing, NYCHA currently adopts a dual preference system that divides applicants into two categories including, “Working Family” and “Need based.” Under the “Working Family” preference, homeless New Yorkers are assigned a priority based on a number of factors including family size and gross income. The “Need based” criteria ranks applicants from “N-0” to “N-8” based on qualifying circumstance. Under this preference, homeless families referred to NYCHA by the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) have “N-0” priority while victims of domestic violence qualify for “N-1,” or second priority.

Assemblyman Luis Sepúlveda, said: "As reported incidences of domestic violence are on the rise in New York City, it is important that we provide victims with a safe place to live. By increasing the NYCHA priority code of domestic violence victim's applications we can help

those suffering get away from the those who are causing them harm. This bill will help the hundreds of victims already on wait lists find housing faster and will help future victims who may feel like they have no where else to go. I look forward to continuing to work on this bill with Senator Klein and Councilman Torres during this year's legislative session."

New York City Councilmember Ritchie Torres (D-Bronx), said: "Victims of domestic violence deserve the same access to safe, affordable housing, as other vulnerable populations. I was deeply moved by testimony from domestic violence survivors that spoke to the hardship of homelessness and lack of equity in the shelter system. Senator Klein's legislation will end this senseless "Tale of Two Shelters" and ensure that those persons homeless as a result of domestic violence are given the same priority as other homeless applicants."

Furthermore, it's not just the priority system that puts domestic violence applicants at a disadvantage, but NYCHA's arduous paperwork and an often overwhelming burden of proof. In order to qualify for the "Need based" priority system, victims of felony crimes are required to show at least two substantiating documents. Applicants who have not been the victim of a felony crime, must show at least three documents, one of which, demonstrates the occurrence two previous domestic violence episodes. As a result, women and children who are the victim of only one domestic violence crime, do not qualify for priority housing at NYCHA facilities.

Judith Kahan, CEO of the Center Against Domestic Violence and founding co-chair of New York City's Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential Service Providers, said: "We are delighted that this legislation will make it easier for battered women to acquire NYCHA permanent housing. Finding safe affordable housing is key to moving past the trauma of domestic violence."

Carol Corden, New Destiny's Executive Director, said: "All homeless families – no matter what shelter system they use – should have access to the city referred homeless priority for public housing. Homeless domestic violence survivors should not be given a lower priority simply because they chose to seek refuge in a shelter system specifically designed to meet their safety and service needs."

Cecelia Gaston, Executive Director of VIP Mujeres, said: "The NYC Coalition Domestic Violence Residential Providers advocated for this change. As a member of the coalition, I am happy to see our elected officials responding. Access to safe housing is a critical factor for domestic violence survivors."

Michael Callaghan, Executive Director of Thorpe Family Residence, said: "Families dislocated by domestic violence need the same priority for access to public housing as other homeless families. Access to permanent housing will enhance the healing and long term well-being of these highly vulnerable families. Nazareth Housing fully supports the legislative remedy offered by Sen. Klein."

Raquel Sing, Executive Director of the Voices of the Women's Organizing Project, said: "The Voices of Women Organizing Project supports the efforts of Senator Klein, Assemblyman Luis Sepúlveda and Council Member Torres to ensure that domestic violence victims and their children have an equal opportunity to attain shelter and live free from violence. Survivors of domestic violence applaud their efforts and encourage all to support the passage this bill."