

# Housing Authority of Gloucester County

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VAWA) POLICY

### I. **Purpose and Applicability:**

Notwithstanding its title, this policy is gender-neutral and its protections are available to males who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking, as well as female victims of such violence. The purpose of this policy (herein called “Policy”) is to implement the applicable provisions of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization of 2013 Act (VAWA) regarding domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking, as hereinafter defined. Neither VAWA nor this Policy implementing it shall preempt or supersede any provision of Federal, State or local law that provides greater protection than that provided under VAWA for victims of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking.

### II. **Goals and Objectives:**

This policy has the following principal goals and objectives:

A. Maintaining compliance, including training of appropriate staff managing the Authority’s properties, with all applicable legal requirements imposed by VAWA;

B. Participating, with others, in protecting the physical safety of victims of actual or threatened domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking who are assisted by the Authority;

C. Providing and maintaining housing opportunities for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking;

D. Cooperating, with others, information and maintenance of collaborative arrangements between the Authority, law enforcement authorities, victim services providers, and others to promote the safety and well-being of victims of actual and threatened domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking, who are assisted by the Authority; and

E. Responding in accordance with the Authority policies and procedures to incidents of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking, affecting individuals assisted by the Authority.

### III. **Definitions:**

A. Bifurcate means - with respect to a public housing or a Section 8 lease, to divide a lease as a matter of law such that certain tenants can be evicted or removed while the remaining affiliated members, lease and occupancy rights are allowed to remain.

B. Domestic Violence – The term ‘domestic violence’ includes felony or misdemeanor crimes of violence committed by a current or former spouse or intimate partner of the victim, by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, by a person who is cohabiting with or has cohabited with the victim as a spouse or intimate partner, 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.”

C. Dating Violence – means 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: i. The length of the relationship. ii. The type of relationship. iii. The frequency of interaction between the persons involved in the relationship.

D. Stalking – means engaging in a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to – 1. Fear for the person’s individual safety or the safety of others; or 2. Suffer substantial emotional distress.

E. Sexual Assault- means any nonconsensual sex act proscribed by Federal, Tribal, or state law including when the victim lacks capacity to consent.

F. Immediate Family Member - means, with respect to a person – 1. a spouse, parent, brother, sister, or child of that person, or an individual to whom that person stands in loco parentis; or 2. any other person living in the household of that person.

G. Perpetrator - means person who commits an act of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking against a victim.

#### IV. **Admissions and Screening**

A. Non-Denial of Assistance. The Authority will not deny admission to public housing or to the Section 8 programs on the basis or as a direct result of the fact that the applicant is or has been a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking if the applicant otherwise qualified for admissions. Further, the Authority will not deny admissions based on an adverse factor, if the adverse factor is determined to be a direct result of the fact that the applicant is or has been a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking,

#### VI. **Termination of Tenancy or Assistance**

A. VAWA Protections. Under VAWA, public housing residents and persons assisted under the Section 8 programs have the following specific protections, which will be observed by the Authority:

1. An incident or incidents of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking will not be considered to be a “serious or repeated” violation of the lease by the victim or threatened victim of that violence and will not be good cause for terminating the tenancy or occupancy rights of or assistance to the victim of that violence.

2. Tenancy or assistance will not be terminated by the Authority on the basis or as a direct result of the fact that the tenant/participant is or has been a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking. Further, the Authority will not terminate tenancy or participation based on an adverse factor, if the adverse factor is determined to be a direct result of the fact that the applicant is or has been a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking. However, the protection against termination of tenancy or assistance described in this paragraph is subject to the following limitations:

i. Nothing contained in this paragraph shall limit any otherwise available authority to terminate tenancy, evict, or to terminate assistance, as the case may be, for any violation of a lease or program requirement not premised on the act or acts of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking in question against the tenant or a member of the tenant’s household. However, in taking any such action, the Authority shall not apply a more demanding standard to the victim of domestic violence dating violence or stalking than that applied to other tenants.

ii. Nothing contained in this paragraph shall be construed to limit the Authority’s ability to evict or terminate from assistance any tenant or lawful applicant if the Authority as the case may be, can demonstrate an actual and imminent threat to other tenants or to those employed at or providing service to the property, if the tenant is not evicted or terminated from assistance.

B. Removal of Perpetrator. Further, notwithstanding the above or Federal, State or local law to the contrary, the Authority, may bifurcate a lease, or remove a household member from a lease, without regard to whether a household member is a signatory to a lease, in order to evict, remove, terminate occupancy rights, or terminate assistance to any individual who is a tenant or lawful occupant and who engages in acts of physical violence against family members or others. Such action against the perpetrator of such physical violence may be taken without evicting, removing, terminating assistance to, or otherwise penalizing the victim of such violence who is also the tenant or a lawful occupant. Such eviction, removal, termination of occupancy rights, or termination of assistance shall be effected in accordance with the procedures prescribed by law applicable to terminations of tenancy and evictions by the Authority.

## **VI. Verification of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence or Stalking**

A. Requirement for Verification. The Authority shall require verification in all cases where an individual claims protection against an action involving such individual proposed to be taken by the Authority. Verification of a claimed incident or incidents of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence or stalking may be accomplished in one of the following three ways: 1. By completing a HUD-approved form 2. Other documentation - by providing to the Authority signed by an employee, agent, or volunteer of a victim service provider, an attorney, or a medical professional, from whom the victim has sought assistance in addressing the domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, or the effects of the abuse, described in such documentation. The professional providing the documentation must sign and attest under penalty of perjury (28 U.S.C. 1746) to the professional's belief that the incident or incidents in question meet the applicable definitions for protections and remedies under VAWA. The victim of the incident or incidents of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking described in the documentation must also sign and attest to the documentation under penalty of perjury. 3. Police or court record – by providing to the Authority a Federal, State, tribal, territorial, or local police or court record describing the incident or incidents in question.

B. Time allowed to provide verification/ failure to provide. An individual who claims protection against adverse action based on an incident or incidents of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, and who is requested by the Authority to provide verification, must provide such verification within 14 business days (i.e., 14 calendar days, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and federally-recognized holidays) after receipt of the request for verification. The Authority may grant an extension during which no adverse action can be taken. Failure to provide verification, in proper form within such time will result in loss of protection under VAWA and this policy against a proposed adverse action.

C. Acceptance of Verbal Statement. The Authority may, with respect to any specific case, waive the above stated requirements for verification and provide the benefits of this policy based on the victim's statement or other corroborating evidence. Such waiver may be granted in the sole discretion of the Executive Director or his/her designee and generally in such cases where the Authority is otherwise aware of the abused and encouraged the victim to request VAWA protections. Any such waiver must be in writing. Waiver in a particular instance or instances shall not operate as precedent for, or create any right to, waiver in any other case or cases, regardless of similarity in circumstances.

### D. Request for Third-Party Documentation of Victim Status

The Authority will request third-party documentation of victim status if more than one applicant or tenant provides documentation to show they are victims of domestic violence,

dating violence, sexual assault or stalk and in the information in one person's documentation conflicts with the information in another person documentation or submitted documentation contains information that conflicts with existing information already available to the Authority.

## **VII. Confidentiality**

A. Right of confidentiality. All information (including the fact that an individual is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking) provided to the Authority in connection with a verification required of this policy or provided in lieu of such verification where a waiver of verification is granted, shall be retained by the receiving party in confidence and shall neither be entered in any shared database nor provided to any related entity, except where disclosure is: 1. requested or consented to by the individual in writing, or 2. required for use in a public housing eviction proceeding or in connection with termination of Section 8 assistance, as permitted in VAWA, or 3. otherwise required by applicable law. The Authority will take reasonable precautions to avoid inadvertent disclosures via mail or voicemail and conduct the exchange of confidential information in person with the victim.

B. Notification of rights. All tenants of public housing and tenants participating in the Section 8 rental assistance program shall be notified in writing concerning their right to confidentiality and the limits on such rights to confidentiality.

## **VIII. Court Orders/Family Break-up**

A. Court orders. It is the Authority's policy to honor orders entered by courts of competent jurisdiction affecting individuals assisted by the Authority. This includes cooperating with law enforcement authorities to enforce civil protection orders issued for the protection of victims and addressing the distribution of personal property among household members in cases where a family breaks up.

## **X. Relationships with Service Providers**

It is the policy of the Authority to cooperate with organizations and entities, both private and governmental that provides shelter and/or services to victims of domestic violence. If the Authority staff becomes aware that an individual assisted by the Authority is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, the Authority will refer the victim to such providers of shelter or services as appropriate.

## **XII. Notification**

The Authority shall provide written notification to applicants, tenants, and Section 8 owners and managers, concerning the rights and obligations created under VAWA relating to confidentiality, denial of assistance and, termination of tenancy or assistance.

## **Housing Authority of Gloucester County**

### **Emergency Transfer Plan for Victims of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, or Stalking**

#### **Emergency Transfers**

The Housing Authority of Gloucester County (HAGC) is concerned about the safety of its tenants, and such concern extends to tenants who are victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. In accordance with the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA),<sup>1</sup> HAGC allows tenants who are victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking to request an emergency transfer from the tenant's current unit to another unit. The ability to request a transfer is available regardless of sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation.<sup>2</sup> The ability of HAGC to honor such request for tenants currently receiving assistance, however, may depend upon a preliminary determination that the tenant is or has been a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, and on whether HAGC has another dwelling unit that is available and is safe to offer the tenant for temporary or more permanent occupancy. This plan identifies tenants who are eligible for an emergency transfer, the documentation needed to request an emergency transfer, confidentiality protections, how an emergency transfer may occur, and guidance to tenants on safety and security. This plan is based on a model emergency transfer plan published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Federal agency that oversees that HAGC's federally assisted housing programs are in compliance with VAWA.

#### **Eligibility for Emergency Transfers**

A tenant who is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, as provided in HUD's regulations at 24 CFR part 5, subpart L is eligible for an emergency transfer, if: the tenant reasonably believes that there is a threat of imminent harm from further violence if the tenant remains within the same unit. If the tenant is a victim of sexual assault, the tenant may also be eligible to transfer if the sexual assault occurred on the premises within the 90-calendar-day period preceding a request for an emergency transfer. A tenant requesting an emergency transfer must expressly request the transfer in accordance with the procedures described in this plan. Tenants who are not in good standing may still request an emergency transfer if they meet the eligibility requirements in this section.

#### **Emergency Transfer Request Documentation**

To request an emergency transfer, the tenant shall notify HAGC's management office and submit a written request for a transfer within the Housing Authority of Gloucester County. HAGC will provide reasonable accommodations to this policy for individuals with disabilities. The tenant's written request for an emergency transfer should include either:

---

<sup>1</sup> Despite the name of this law, VAWA protection is available to all victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking, regardless of sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

<sup>2</sup> Housing providers cannot discriminate on the basis of any protected characteristic, including race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, disability, or age. HUD-assisted and HUD-insured housing must be made available to all otherwise eligible individuals regardless of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status.

1. A statement expressing that the tenant reasonably believes that there is a threat of imminent harm from further violence if the tenant were to remain in the same dwelling unit assisted under HAGC's program; OR
2. A statement that the tenant was a sexual assault victim and that the sexual assault occurred on the premises during the 90-calendar-day period preceding the tenant's request for an emergency transfer.

### **Confidentiality**

HAGC will keep confidential any information that the tenant submits in requesting an emergency transfer, and information about the emergency transfer, unless the tenant gives HAGC written permission to release the information on a time limited basis, or disclosure of the information is required by law or required for use in an eviction proceeding or hearing regarding termination of assistance from the covered program. This includes keeping confidential the new location of the dwelling unit of the tenant, if one is provided, from the person(s) that committed an act(s) of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking against the tenant. See the Notice of Occupancy Rights under the Violence Against Women Act For All Tenants for more information about HAGC's responsibility to maintain the confidentiality of information related to incidents of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

### **Emergency Transfer Timing and Availability**

HAGC cannot guarantee that a transfer request will be approved or how long it will take to process a transfer request. HAGC will, however, act as quickly as possible to move a tenant who is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking to another unit, subject to availability and safety of a unit. If a tenant reasonably believes a proposed transfer would not be safe, the tenant may request a transfer to a different unit. If a unit is available, the transferred tenant must agree to abide by the terms and conditions that govern occupancy in the unit to which the tenant has been transferred. HAGC may be unable to transfer a tenant to a particular unit if the tenant has not or cannot establish eligibility for that unit.

If, after a reasonable time, HAGC has no safe and available units for which a tenant who needs an emergency is eligible, HAGC will assist the tenant in identifying other housing providers who may have safe and available units to which the tenant could move. This shall be deemed an "External Emergency Transfer", meaning a transfer of a tenant to another unit or form of assistance where the tenant would be categorized as a new applicant. This shall include a transfer from an HAGC Public Housing unit to the HAGC's or GHA's Section 8 Voucher Program. At the tenant's request, HAGC will also assist tenants in contacting the local organizations offering assistance to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking that are attached to this plan.

### **Safety and Security of Tenants**

Pending processing of the transfer and the actual transfer, if it is approved and occurs, the tenant is urged to take all reasonable precautions to be safe.

Tenants who are or have been victims of domestic violence are encouraged to contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233, or a local domestic violence shelter, for assistance in creating a safety plan. For persons with hearing impairments, that hotline can be accessed by calling 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).

Tenants who have been victims of sexual assault may call the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network's National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-HOPE, or visit the online hotline at <https://ohl.rainn.org/online/>.

Tenants who are or have been victims of stalking seeking help may visit the National Center for Victims of Crime's Stalking Resource Center at <https://www.victimsofcrime.org/our-programs/stalking-resource-center>.

Please see local organizations offering assistance to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

- **Center for Family Services – Services Empowering the Rights of Victims (SERV)**  
[www.centerffs.org](http://www.centerffs.org)  
serv@centerffs.org  
1-866-295-SERV (7378)  
PO Box 566  
Glassboro, NJ 08028
- **NJ Domestic Violence Hotline**  
[www.nj.gov/dcf/women/domestic](http://www.nj.gov/dcf/women/domestic)  
1-855-INFO-DCF (463-6323)  
PO Box 729  
Trenton, NJ 08625
- **Family Part-Chancery Division Superior Court of NJ**  
1-856-379-2200  
101 S 5th Street, 2nd Floor  
Camden, NJ 08103
- **New Jersey Domestic Violence Hotline**  
1-800-572-SAFE (7233)

