

**TESTIMONY FROM NYCHA VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS BRIAN CLARKE
EVALUATION OF THE VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE NEED-BASED PREFERENCE
CATEGORY AND SUPPORT AND SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN
NYCHA DEVELOPMENTS
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2014 – 10:00 AM
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL, NEW YORK, NY**

Chairman Ritchie Torres, members of the Committee on Public Housing, and other distinguished members of the City Council: good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the support and services that the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) provides to victims of domestic violence as well as the priority they are given for admissions and transfers. I am Brian Clarke, Vice President of Operations. Joining me today is Nora Reissig, the Director of NYCHA's Family Services Department. We are also joined by the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence (MOCDV) Commissioner Rosemonde Pierre-Louis, who will also be giving remarks, and Cecile Noel from the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA), who will be available for questions.

This is an important issue for the Authority, as well as for the Council, and it's especially relevant today considering that October is "National Domestic Violence Awareness Month." According to recent statistics from the NYPD, 14 percent of all domestic violence-related major felonies in the City occur in NYCHA developments, and about one-third of major felony crimes occurring in NYCHA developments are related to domestic violence. But we believe that everyone deserves to feel safe in their homes. And we know that access to safe, affordable housing is a critical resource for domestic violence survivors and their families – stable, permanent housing helps them flee the abuse and live violence-free.

Support and Services for Victims of Domestic Violence

First, I'd like to describe our multi-faceted approach to assisting victims of domestic violence at NYCHA developments, which involves several programs and policies. Central to NYCHA's efforts to help affected residents is our Family

Services Department of about 150 staff, including 30 professionally trained and certified social workers, who advocate every day for residents in need. As part of its domestic violence outreach, Family Services receives referrals from NYCHA staff, residents, the NYPD and other City agencies, District Attorney's Offices, community-based organizations, and elected officials. Then they conduct a home visit and will do an assessment, safety planning, and crisis counseling, making any necessary referrals to our Emergency Transfer Program and/or a community-based provider or City agency. Each referral is handled on a case-by-case basis, according to individual needs.

The Emergency Transfer Program enables residents and their families suffering from domestic violence to relocate confidentially to a development in another area. NYCHA staff will help residents get the needed documentation for a transfer, and will identify other transfer and support options if a resident does not meet the criteria for a transfer or chooses to not relocate. Since 2011, 1,145 residents have transferred to a safe, new home, including 224 this year so far.

The experience of Ms. P is just one of the many success stories. Before her transfer, she suffered more than 10 years of physical, verbal, and emotional abuse at the hands of her husband, the father of their two children. He put a gun to her head and threatened to kill her; locked her in a closet; held her hostage in their apartment; beat her in front of their children; and abandoned her in another country without a passport. She went to a shelter to escape the abuse. But thanks to an emergency transfer and assistance such as counseling, Ms. P is now living a violence-free life. She advocates for other women suffering from domestic violence and still keeps in touch with Family Services Department staff. Her children are doing well too, after getting connected to therapy and recreational, job training, and employment opportunities – one of them is now a journalist.

Mayor de Blasio has tasked City agencies with working collaboratively to address the affordable housing needs of the City's most vulnerable, including victims of domestic violence. I'm pleased to say that NYCHA already has an excellent track

record of coordinating critical services with other agencies. We refer households that are transferring due to domestic violence to HRA's Domestic Violence Aftercare Program. The program helps with pre-relocation moving logistics and expenses; provides safety planning and counseling; offers post-relocation counseling for the family; helps them adjust to life in a new community; and advocates for any needed services at the new location.

Another valuable and especially effective collaboration with HRA is the Domestic Violence Intervention, Education, and Prevention Program, known as DVIEP. Case Managers partner with Domestic Violence Police Officers, who are located in the NYPD Housing Bureau precincts. This team does outreach to every NYCHA household where domestic violence is reported, letting the victims know they are not alone, and provides crisis counseling, safety assessments, and service referrals. Case Managers raise awareness about domestic violence by regularly presenting to Resident Associations, NYCHA staff, police officers, and community members and by distributing information at NYCHA Family Days.

This year, NYCHA launched a renewed partnership with MOCDV to share information and coordinate assistance to the community. MOCDV set up NYCHA Domestic Violence Response Teams to conduct outreach at the 15 housing developments included in the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety.

We also partner with MOCDV to provide ongoing training for NYCHA staff on identifying domestic violence at our developments. About 600 staff will be trained this year, including Property Management staff, who are in touch with residents every day. We also train staff at our community centers, Customer Contact Center, Applications and Tenancy Administration Department, Office of Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability, Office of Resident Engagement, and Family Services Department. We make sure that our domestic violence training reaches multiple levels of staff so that they all can identify domestic violence, speak with victims so they feel supported not judged, and connect victims to services. Thanks to the knowledge they've gained about

domestic violence, NYCHA staff refer more than 200 residents in need of assistance to the Family Services Department each year. Our expectation is that these trainings tailored to NYCHA will go a long way in promoting residents' safety and well-being. Just last week, after attending training, a Property Manager at one of our developments identified a victim abused by her husband. With subsequent outreach, she accepted a referral to the Family Justice Center, and others. She now has the support she needs for any next steps.

Domestic violence is often viewed in terms of long-time couples. But studies show that it also impacts young people in new relationships, seniors, and other intimate partners. To help focus on youth, some community centers at our developments host the NYC Healthy Relationship Training Academy as part of a multi-agency effort. The Academy's workshops teach teenagers and young adults about dating violence and healthy relationships at this pivotal time when they are forming their first relationships. Parents can also participate. So far, there have been six sessions in the Bronx and Brooklyn, reaching 105 youth, and six more are scheduled for later this month.

On October 18, NYCHA will host our 13th Domestic Violence Conference and Resource Fair, and hundreds of residents are expected to attend. The conference, at Hostos Community College in the Bronx, will feature an impressive array of speakers and domestic violence experts such as MOCDV Commissioner Rosemonde Pierre-Louis. Participating organizations include the Bronx Family Justice Center; the Queens Family Justice Center; Children of Domestic Violence; and The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center. It also features Ted Bunch, co-founder of A CALL TO MEN, who is known internationally for his work to end violence against women by promoting a loving and respectful notion of manhood. We're getting the word out about this conference through social and traditional media. We're reaching out to men in particular so that Bunch's message about healthy manhood will inspire men to become part of the solution. As domestic violence is on everyone's minds, HRA and MOCDV are co-sponsoring the conference, and we're organizing it in

coordination with resident leaders, the NYPD, the District Attorney's Offices, community-based organizations and advocates, and service providers.

The federal Violence Against Women Act, known as VAWA, also provides support to our residents. The law protects authorized household members who are abuse victims from being evicted based on the violence in their homes. And it enables NYCHA to evict an abusive household member while preserving the tenancy of the remaining family members. VAWA also protects applicants from being denied housing simply because they are victims of domestic violence.

It should be noted that as part of our commitment to providing equal opportunity for all residents and applicants, we provide language assistance services, such as interpretation and translation, for domestic violence victims with limited English proficiency.

NYCHA's concern for this pressing issue is not just as a landlord, but also as an employer. NYCHA's "Domestic Violence in the Workplace" policy and procedure was implemented in 2011 to increase awareness of domestic violence among all 11,000 employees – about 25 percent of whom are also residents – and to increase supportive workplace responses to it.

Admissions and Transfer Priority for Victims of Domestic Violence

At a time when affordable housing is desperately needed but in short supply, it is not surprising that there are nearly 290,000 families on our waitlist and the apartment turnover rate is only 3 percent. We strive to serve as many people in need as possible, especially the most vulnerable. Last year, we provided apartments to 286 victims of domestic violence. And in 2014, we've housed 346 domestic violence victims as of October 9, already exceeding last year's numbers. So, together with the emergency transfers, we've assisted 570 domestic violence victims so far this year.

Victims of domestic violence on the waitlist are currently, and have always been, assigned one of the highest priorities to receive an apartment. Domestic violence victims are assigned “need-based one,” or N-1, priority. Domestic violence victims also receive one of the highest priorities for transfers. These categories are part of the computerized Tenant Selection and Assignment Plan, a fair, federally mandated system that equitably matches apartments with those who need them. Details about how this system works are described on our website.

As part of our efforts to increase efficiency and transparency, NYCHA improved the process for receiving and reviewing applicants’ requests for domestic violence victim priority. It’s important for the public to better understand this process and see the actual numbers. That’s why we also post the number of applicants who are certified N-1. That data, updated every quarter, is broken down by emergency priority number and requested borough and apartment size.

Domestic Violence Certification and Verification Policy Changes

NYCHA is further revising its policies to continue to provide real-world solutions to the problem of domestic violence. Earlier this month, Chair Shola Olatoye and other NYCHA leadership met with domestic violence advocates and MOCDV to get their ideas on how we can continue to improve our policies and programs. One such policy change underway is an expansion of the specific types of crimes that qualify as a domestic violence offense, with the list growing to about 80 from 21. A single instance of any of these crimes will qualify as a domestic violence offense.

We are also expanding the types of medical documentation that will assist domestic violence victims get priority for admissions and transfers. We are working closely with the Health and Hospitals Corporation and the Greater New York Hospital Association to make this happen.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is a pervasive crime that destroys families and harms the communities we care so much about. As we all know, it has dominated the headlines recently. Although it's tragic for the people affected, this has raised awareness of the complexities of the problem. Hopefully, together as a society, we can reduce this violence in our communities, through data, education, and prevention. Fortunately, NYCHA residents who are impacted by domestic violence have the resources they need to get help and move on; our supportive services and admissions and transfer policies are designed to help victims go from crisis to stability.

Thank you for your continued support. Following Commissioner Pierre-Louis' testimony, we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.