

Safe Communities Coalition

Promoting Housing Stability and Public Safety

An Act Providing Housing Rights for Victims of Domestic Violence, Rape, Sexual Assault and Stalking S586/H386

Lead Sponsors: Sen. Cynthia Stone Creem and Rep. Ellen Story

The Problem

No one should have to choose between safety and housing.

Victims of rape, sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking in Massachusetts face a crisis in housing stability, homelessness and public safety because of a lack of housing protections.

- Janice obtained a 209a restraining order against her abusive husband. Her landlord, who was also her father-in-law, immediately began eviction proceedings seeking back rent, even though they had previously been living rent free. Janice had no defense to the eviction and was forced to move.
- Darcy was sexually assaulted by an acquaintance that lived across the street. Darcy felt unsafe in her apartment and in her neighborhood. Darcy asked her landlord to be released from the lease but he refused. Darcy stayed on a friend's couch while she continued to pay rent for 7 months.
- John was stalked by a co-worker. John's apartment was secure but the co-worker had a key from a prior time. For several weeks John would arrive home and find "gifts" on his kitchen table. The landlord refused to permit him to change the locks. Worried about his immediate safety, John moved to a hotel.

The Solution

This bill will help alleviate this crisis by providing rights and protections for victims of these crimes, while protecting the rights of property owners, in the following ways:

- Prevents owners from refusing to rent or renew a lease, or from terminating a tenancy due to reasons related to a person's victimization.
- Protects victims from financial penalties of early lease termination solely for reasons related to violence committed against them.
- Authorizes lock changes, at tenant's expense, to increase safety from violence.
- Current landlord remedies for the protection of property and other tenants remain in tact.

Massachusetts lags behind other states

- Federal housing programs across the US provide similar protections
- Many states have implemented similar measures locally
- Property owners in states with similar laws have not experienced serious negative impacts

For more information about Safe Communities Coalition, please contact:

Jane Doe Inc:
Maureen Gallagher
Policy Director
mgallagher@janedoe.org
(617)557-1808

Boston Area Rape Crisis Center:
Stephanie Decandia
Mgr of Systems Advocacy & Policy Development
sdecandia@barcc.org
(617) 492-8306

Safe Communities Coalition Members

AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts
ACLU of Massachusetts
Boston Area Rape Crisis Center
Gay Men's Domestic Violence Program
HEARTH
Homes for Families
HomeStart
Jane Doe Inc.
Massachusetts Citizens for Children

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC)
Mass Union of Public Housing Tenants
On the Rise
UAW Regional CAP
Victim Rights Law Center
Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts

Jane Doe Inc. Member Programs

A New Day
A Safe Place
Alternative House
Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence
AWAKE Program
Boston Medical Center Domestic Violence Program
Brockton Family & Community Resources
Cape Cod Center for Women
Casa Myrna Vazquez
Center for Hope & Healing (an agency of Rape Crisis Center of Greater Lowell)
Center for Violence Prevention & Recovery
Close to Home
Community Advocacy Program (CAP) of CCHERS
CONNECT to End Violence
Daybreak Resources of the YWCA of Central Massachusetts
DVSN - Domestic Violence Services Network
DOVE Inc.
Elizabeth Freeman Center
Everywoman's Center
FINEX House
HarborCOV
HAVEN
HAWC - Healing Abuse Working for Change
Horizon's Housing Program
IMPACT
Independence House, Inc.
International Institute of Boston
Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center
Journey to Safety, the Domestic Abuse program of Jewish Family & Children's Service
Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS)

Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) Program
NELCWIT - New England Learning Center for Women in Transition
New Hope, Inc.
North Shore Rape Crisis Center
Passageway at Brigham and Women's Hospital
Project We Can Talk About It (Children's Charter)
Rape Crisis Center of Central Massachusetts
REACH Beyond Domestic Violence
Renewal House
RESPOND Inc.
Safe Passage
Roxbury Multi-Service Center
Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership
SAHELI Friendship for South Asian Women
Scattered Site Transitional Apartment Program
South Shore Women's Resource Center
Spanish American Center
SSTAR Women's Center
Supportive Care, Inc.
The DV/SA Program of Newton-Wellesley Hospital
The Elizabeth Stone House
The Network/La Red
The Second Step
The Women's Center
Transition House
Voices Against Violence
Wayside Valley Rape Crisis Program
Womanshelter/Compañeras
Women's Resource Center at the YWCA of Haverhill
YWCA of Greater Lawrence
YWCA/Battered Women's Resources

