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MAYOR MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG ANNOUNCES HOUSING INITIATIVES TO AID VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

City Increases Options for Domestic Violence Victims Applying for Housing

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg today announced several measures designed to increase the safety of victims of domestic violence by streamlining access to public and subsidized housing. The new initiatives will employ upgraded technology and the coordinated efforts of several City agencies to make safe housing easier to obtain for all domestic violence victims. Commissioner of the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence Yolanda B. Jimenez and Chairman of the New York City Housing Authority Tino Hernandez joined the Mayor for the announcement at the 2003 Domestic Violence Conference. The conference, sponsored by the Mayor's Office, was held at Pace University.

"From the beginning of this administration, we have been committed to doing whatever it takes to protect victims of domestic violence," said Mayor Bloomberg. "Nothing is more important than a safe place to live, but a complex system can sometimes make it hard for victims to get the housing that they need and deserve. Our new domestic violence initiatives will streamline the system and make it more user-friendly for those who need it most."

The new initiatives are a direct result of the work of the Domestic Violence Response Teams (DVRT), a pilot program announced by the Mayor in May 2002. Composed of representatives from City agencies and community-based organizations, DVRT teams work exclusively in two precincts with high rates of domestic violence to monitor the provision of services to victims and children who are most at risk. During the first year, team members learned that finding appropriate housing is one of the most complicated and stressful problems confronting victims of domestic violence. The problem is also pervasive; approximately 93% of DVRT families requested help in obtaining housing. Navigating a complicated shelter and housing system administered by several City and State agencies can often be overwhelming. In addition, research has shown that victims are at an increased risk of harm at the time they leave violent relationships, and are more likely to be murdered at that time than any other.

"By listening to victims, we have learned what they need, and we are working hard to meet those needs," said Commissioner Jimenez. "Victims of domestic violence will now have easier access to housing, which can be the route to safety."

"Consistent with our long-standing commitment in this area, NYCHA will continue to work proactively to improve public housing opportunities for victims of domestic violence," said Chairman

Hernandez.

Building on the lessons learned from the DVRT program, the new initiatives will simplify the housing application process and make it easier for domestic violence victims to obtain both emergency shelter and permanent housing:

- The City will provide more beds for the transition between emergency and permanent housing. By the end of this fiscal year, the number of longer-stay transitional units will be increased by 11%, the first such increase since 2001.
- More housing options will be made available to victims who are current or prospective New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) tenants by allowing them to apply for housing within their home borough. In the past, victims of domestic violence seeking to relocate within the public housing system, or move into NYCHA housing for the first time were required to move to an entirely different borough for safety reasons. This restriction has been removed. Victims will now be able to obtain new apartments within their home boroughs as long as they are a safe distance away – within a different set of zip codes – from their former residences.
- Applications for public housing and Section 8 housing vouchers will be expedited through NYCHA's use of an on-line database to conduct Federally mandated criminal background eligibility reviews of applicants. The old system was time-consuming and posed a particular challenge for victims who have a limited time within which to find housing.
- Victims will be assigned a PIN number to allow them to learn the status of their NYCHA housing applications over the phone. Previously, without the PIN number process, victims of domestic violence were required to go to the housing office in person, usually with children in tow, to check the status of their applications. The new system will allow victims to access this information safely and immediately.
- Victims who are seriously injured as a result of a felony offense will now be given priority consideration by NYCHA. Previously, such consideration was only given if there were two separate documented incidents of domestic violence.

The Human Resources Administration currently provides 1,832 domestic violence emergency beds and 155 units of domestic violence transitional shelter. Last year alone, HRA provided shelter for over 7,000 victims, two-thirds of them children. The new initiatives will be effective by the end of this year. Through the City's efforts, family related homicides are down 23.3%, and the combined rape, homicide and felony assaults are down 11.5% since this time last year.

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