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Our Campaigns

Battered Mother's Justice
—*Improve the family courts
response to survivors of
domestic violence*

False & Malicious Child
Abuse—*Discourage false &
malicious child abuse
reports against survivors of
domestic violence*

Housing Justice—*Organize
for safe & affordable housing
for survivors of domestic
violence*

VOW's Response: NYCHA's Section 8 Voucher Crisis

Voices of Women Organizing Project (VOW) calls upon New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to reinstate in full, with funding support from other city or state resources, the 3,018 section 8 vouchers they rescinded at the end of December 2009. VOW also presses NYCHA to undertake a full internal audit in an effort to determine culpability and establish financial transparency. NYCHA needs to reinstate its commitment to working on behalf of, and not against, lower-income communities of New York City.

The revocation of the vouchers during the holiday season from over 3,000 families highlights a distinct flaw in the organizational priorities of NYCHA. Poor fiscal planning and the subsequent lack of public review creates a decreased confidence in the largest public housing authority in the country to uphold its mandate to maintain permanent and affordable housing options in the five boroughs. The families who lost the vouchers now face certain homelessness: without Section 8 assistance, most will be evicted and enter or remain in the homeless shelter system. For most of the 407 survivors of domestic violence inclusive of this group, losing their Section 8 rental subsidy also means losing their lifeline.

The ability to access permanent and affordable housing options when leaving an abusive relationship is crucial. As the majority of our membership will attest to, the risk of violence intensifies during the time that a woman tries to leave her abusive relationship, therefore increasing her sense of urgency. Similarly, women who exit emergency shelter without permanent housing are vulnerable to homelessness and exploitation yet again. Many will return to their abuser if sleeping in the streets is the only alternative.

For survivors with children, the stakes of homelessness become even higher, making it difficult to provide for their family. A mother's sound mind and body is pivotal to the development of her children. Children are going to be subjected to further danger and instability and lose vital family or community ties in the process. VOW exists to ensure that the voice of the survivor is never silenced and to prevent re-victimization by the very same institutions in which women seek justice for themselves. The arbitrary and underhanded nature of NYCHA's decision resonates in particular for victims of domestic violence who thought they were leaving coercive power and manipulation behind, only to see it replicated in the form of NYCHA's broken promises.

The domestic violence (DV) survivors who received a Section 8 voucher already endured an arduous application process for DV priority through NYCHA during which they had to provide extensive documentation. NYCHA's requirements place the burden of proof on women to demonstrate they have actually experienced intimate partner violence, in the form of police reports and hospital records that may be non-existent or extremely dangerous to obtain, all during a time when they are severely traumatized and lacking resources.

The withdrawal of the vouchers from these survivors who have gone through this difficult process is another reminder of NYCHA's inadequacy to fully understand and support this marginalized population and their housing needs. Women are entitled to safe homes, free of violence. NYCHA can no longer remain complicit in denying these to them.