

Sample OpEd Piece (Guest Editorial)

The following is sample text that should be revised and localized to reflect your community and submitted to a local newspaper. The more the piece reflects local concerns, the more likely that a newspaper will run it. If a daily newspaper does not run it, consider submitting it to a weekly newspaper in your town, city, or county.

Print it on your letterhead and include:

Your name

Job title

Agency

Address

Phone number

Email

Website

Victims Deserve a Safe Place to Live

Affordable housing is one of the most serious obstacles to achieving safety for victims of sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking. In order to break the cycle of abuse, many victims need to relocate to a new residence after abuse occurs. Unfortunately, many victims who rent cannot afford the financial consequences of breaking a lease and are forced to remain in housing where perpetrators are able to continue abusing them. Others are unable to seek police protection because some landlords stipulate that they can charge a fee or seek an eviction if the police are called to the premises.

The Wisconsin State Legislature should act quickly to remove some of these obstacles. The “Safe Housing Act,” has been introduced into the legislature that would allow victims to secure safer housing. The Safe Housing Act would allow victims to cancel their current lease, if they provide documentation of the abuse and notice to their landlords. The bill also prevents municipalities from charging a fee for emergency services and voids lease provisions that restrict a tenant’s ability to access emergency services.

Passage of this bill is incredibly important for victims. The crimes of sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking are fundamentally about a perpetrator exercising control over the life, body and freedom of a victim. This loss of control is needlessly magnified when the victim realizes she is unable to protect her herself and her children by moving to a safer apartment or calling the police for help. This bill will empower victims and help them establish control of their lives. The vast majority of victims know their perpetrators, which means that most perpetrators know where the victim lives. Allowing a victim to move immediately after an assault can dramatically increase a victim’s safety and emotional wellbeing, regardless of where the abuse took place.

The bill is also commonsense crime prevention. There is no justification for leases that restrict the ability of those in danger to seek police protection. These leases only enable criminals to elude justice and endanger vulnerable victims and our communities. When

residents are able to receive police assistance without fear of losing their homes, the police may be able to apprehend perpetrators before they commit more violence.

This bill protects victims without placing an undue burden on landlords. The lease canceling provision of the bill will only be available to persons who are in imminent danger. Under the bill, a victim must provide her landlord with formal documentation of the abuse, such as a criminal complaint or no contact order, and notice before she can break a lease.

No one should have to choose between financial ruin and his or her family's safety. Please contact your state legislators and ask them to ensure the safety of victims of sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking by supporting the Safe Housing Act.