

MIAMILAW | Human Rights
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI SCHOOL OF LAW Clinic

This testimony was delivered on April 7, 2014, during a public hearing before the Miami Dade Board of County Commissioners to discuss the 2014 Public Housing and Community Development Proposed Policies and Procedures.

Good afternoon distinguished Commissioners, members of the Public Housing and Community Development Department, and fellow participants,

My name is Charlotte Cassel and I am a student attorney in the University of Miami School of Law Human Rights Clinic. On behalf of Professor Caroline Bettinger-Lopez and my classmates, we would like to thank PHCD for their positive response to our previous comments, in which we suggested ways in which public housing policies can better protect victims and survivors of domestic violence. We know that victims of domestic violence face numerous problems when it comes to finding safe housing and we applaud the efforts made by the Department. We look forward to working together to ensure that policies intended to protect these individuals and their families continue to be both strengthened and enforced.

Today I would like to address two additional areas in which PHCD could alter their policies in a way that encourages broader protection for survivors of domestic violence. First, we recommend that the provisions on transfer and eligibility policies be further clarified. Specifically, the current language says that victims of domestic violence “will be considered” for transfer, but it should indicate that, pursuant to VAWA 2013, victims should be able to transfer between public housing and Section 8 programs. The provisions on transfer should also address the time-sensitive nature of domestic violence situations. There should be an explicit goal of making an emergency transfer available

within 72 hours. Moreover, current language allows victims of domestic violence “reasonable time” to establish their own eligibility for subsidized housing or find alternative housing when the perpetrator of violence is the sole tenant eligible for this program. The language should be altered to give these victims a minimum of 60 days to do so.

Second, the UM Human Rights Clinic suggests the convening of a working group dedicated to addressing issues related to domestic violence and public housing in Miami-Dade County. We think that such a working group is a natural outgrowth of the 2012 resolution of the Miami-Dade County Commission that declares freedom from domestic violence to be a fundamental human right and charges local agencies with incorporating that principle into their policies and practices. The 2014 administrative plan proposed by PHCD specifically cites to that domestic violence resolution on p. 171. We hope that PHCD will be open to working with us and other domestic violence and housing advocates on these additional policy changes. We look forward to working together to realize the goal of the resolution: that all Miami-Dade residents are free from domestic violence. Thank you for your time this afternoon.

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