

OWNER UPDATE



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"The mission of the Cambridge Housing Authority is to develop and manage safe, good quality, affordable housing for low-income individuals and families in a manner which promotes citizenship, community & self reliance."

THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT: UNDERSTANDING OWNER RESPONSIBILITIES

The federal Violence Against Women Act of 2005 (VAWA), signed into law in January 2006, includes several new legal protections and programs for victims of dating violence, stalking, sexual assault and domestic violence.

The new law significantly effects the tenancy rights of people living in public housing and those renting a unit in the private market with assistance from the Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program. It is important that owners are aware of these legal changes and the new rights afforded to domestic violence victims. Specifically, the law makes it easier for victims to retain their housing when domestic violence occurs in a subsidized unit.

VAWA provides the following protections to domestic violence victims living in subsidized housing:

1. Landlords may not consider incidents of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking as serious or repeated violations of the lease or other "good cause" for termination of assistance, tenancy or occupancy rights of the victim of abuse.
2. Landlords may not consider criminal activity directly relating to abuse, engaged in by a member of a tenant's household or any guest or other person under the tenant's control, cause for termination of assistance, tenancy, or occupancy rights if the tenant or an immediate member of the tenant's family is the victim or threatened victim of that abuse.
3. Landlords may request in writing that the victim, or a family member on the victim's behalf, certify that the individual is a victim of abuse and that the Certification of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence or Stalking, Form HUD-91066, or other documentation as noted on the certification form, be completed and submitted within 14 business days, or an agreed upon extension date, to receive protection under the VAWA. Failure to provide the certification or other supporting documentation within the specified timeframe may result in eviction.

Owners can visit HUD's website www.hud.gov to learn more about VAWA and how it impacts their subsidized tenants.

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MEDIATION FOR RESULTS PAPERTRAIL: DOCUMENTATION HELP YOU CAN REALLY USE!

As a property manager or landlord you know the challenge: how to be reasonable with tenants while protecting your rights? A new service from local non-profit Mediation for Results (MFR) can help you resolve tenant disputes in a way that keeps the peace with tenants without compromising your rights, business interests or composure.

Named PaperTrail, this approach helps owners use documentation to reach workable tenant agreements WHILE advancing their legal rights. Whether addressing issues over noise and nuisance, back rent, unauthorized occupants or security deposits, PaperTrail can help you problem solve effectively while exercising your rights. And MFR knows what it's talking about, having handled over two thousand landlord-tenant cases since 1989.

PaperTrail was conceived as a response to a real need to document disputes before they escalate rather than at the crisis point. Types of documents that can be written include: agreements, plans, clarifications of rights and responsibilities, notifications that tenancies have been breached, and specifics for how to resolve conflicts and strengthen relationships.

Next time you have a thorny tenancy issue that might benefit from tact and toughness but you just can't find the right words or tone... contact PaperTrail for a **free consultation**. They will discuss how they can help, or make a referral. MFR can provide these **free or affordable services** thanks in part to funding from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and other sources. Services are fast, inexpensive and can significantly **reduce your professional fees and valuable time** spent on difficult communications.

In addition to PaperTrail, MFR provides conflict resolution, housing occupancy stabilization, training and legal education for owners and tenants. Areas of mediation include: landlord/tenant, business, family/divorce and land use. MFR is a program of Just-A-Start, a Cambridge-based community development corporation located at Just A Start, 1035 Cambridge St. #12, Cambridge, MA 02141. Contact Peter Shapiro at **617 494-0444 ext 317** or **shapiro@mediationforresults.org**. MFR's website is www.mediationforresults.org.

FAQ: CHARGING FOR WATER USE

CHA continues to receive inquiries from tenants and owners about the state's water sub-metering law. As a reminder, owners must have a **verified water law compliance certificate** from the City Inspectional Services Department in order to charge tenants for water use.

Information on the water sub-metering law is available online at www.masslegalhelp.org/housing/booklets/water-law.