



CLINT ZWEIFEL
MISSOURI STATE TREASURER

April 22, 2015

Via email to kstetzler@mhdc.com

Mr. Kip Stetzler
Executive Director
Missouri Housing Development Commission
920 Main Street, Suite 1400
Kansas City, MO 64105

Re: Request for Change to Special Needs Definition to Include Domestic Violence Survivors

Dear Mr. Stetzler,

In 2011, the Missouri Housing Development Commission unanimously approved my proposal to amend its Qualified Allocation Plan to set aside a third of Low Income Housing Tax Credits for developments that serve populations with special needs. As a result and to date, more than 1,000 special needs units of quality, affordable permanent housing have been approved by the Commission. These units serve our most vulnerable Missouri neighbors; those with physical, mental or developmental impairments, those who are homeless and youth aging out of foster care. In my work as State Treasurer and as a Missouri Housing Development Commissioner, I have had the honor to meet and speak with many individuals whose lives have been changed for the better due to this important work of the Commission.

But we must continually revisit this work to ensure that our policy is adequately serving those most in need. It is for this reason that I write to you to ask that the Commission consider an addition to the current definition of special needs populations.

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence ("NCADV") states that an estimated 1.3 million individuals are victims of domestic violence each year. The 2013 Missouri Statewide Homelessness Study, conducted by the University of Missouri - St. Louis Public Policy Research Center, found that survivors of domestic violence were the third largest subpopulation of homeless individuals in the state, following those with chronic substance abuse and those with severe mental illness. The study also found that between 2007 and 2012, the number of homeless domestic violence survivors increased by 37% statewide. The increase was most prevalent in St. Louis City, which saw a 236% rise in the number of homeless domestic violence survivors. During those same years, Kansas City's population of homeless domestic violence survivors increased by 61%.

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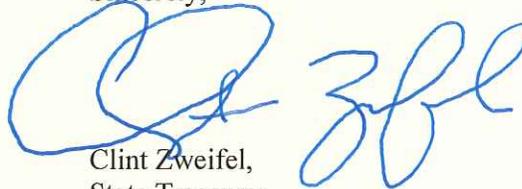
However, the research tells us that these statistics do not provide the whole story. Victims of domestic violence are often not adequately represented in homeless counts because they use a variety of strategies, such as staying with family or friends, to avoid living on the street. When that is not an option, many are forced to stay with their abusers because of a lack of available shelters or affordable permanent housing. The NCADV cites a 2004 study which found that 46% of homeless women reported staying in an abusive relationship because they had nowhere to go. A victim's history of abuse can contribute to poor employment, credit or rental histories which also can affect her ability to obtain housing.

Once housed, survivors of domestic violence require special considerations that are different than the general homeless population. For example, they require confidential housing to ensure their safety. This significantly limits their options when it comes to affordable permanent housing. Survivors of domestic violence are better served by lead referral agencies and local service agencies that focus on their particular needs, which they do not obtain in housing that is set aside for the general homeless population.

Through community initiative programs such as the Emergency Solutions Grant, the Missouri Housing Trust Fund, and the Housing First Program, MHDC has shown a commitment to supporting local agencies that focus on housing for domestic violence survivors. But it's time to do more.

I urge the Commission to expand our definition of special needs to specifically include survivors of domestic violence. By making this important change, we can encourage the development community to consider permanent housing projects that will support these individuals by focusing on their particular needs and circumstances.

Sincerely,



Clint Zweifel,
State Treasurer

cc: Ms. Tina Beer, Missouri Housing Development Commission
Missouri Housing Development Commissioners