

SB 150

Committee on Judiciary

February 28, 2019

SUPPORT

eliminating racism
empowering women

ywca

YWCA of NE Kansas
225 W. 12th Street
Topeka, KS 66612
P 785.233.1750
F 785.2334867
ywcaneks.org

To Chairman Wilborn, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information related to your consideration of Senate Bill 150, an act relating to housing protections for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking or stalking.

My name is Michelle McCormick and I am the program director for the YWCA Center for Safety and Empowerment (CSE). For over 40 years, our program has provided services to victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking and human trafficking, in Topeka and the surrounding area.

The victims and survivors we serve are often under constant threat of abuse. While each survivors' situation is a unique story of navigating risks and dangers, we find that there are commonalities in the barriers they face to achieve safety. Chief among these is having to face the very real prospect of either losing their homes, or not being able to obtain safe housing due to the actions of an abuser. There are few protections with regard to housing in our State for the victims of these crimes. Some housing practices may even unintentionally punish victims of crime for seeking police protection. Having the ability to leave a dangerous home without penalty or obtaining a safe home without discrimination because of experiencing victimization is critically important.

I want to share with you a story about "Mary". Mary is a survivor of domestic violence who is still navigating the recovery from the devastating abuse from her significant other. Because of this, she could not meet with you all in person to tell her story. I have changed her name to protect her identity. She wanted me to tell you that they were tenants in an apartment complex in Topeka. She was physically assaulted by him one night, and called the police. Her abuser was arrested and he went to jail. In the days following the assault, Mary contacted her apartment complex and

eliminating racism
empowering women

ywca

YWCA of NE Kansas

225 W. 12th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

P 785.233.1750

F 785.2334867

ywcaneks.org

the housing subsidy provider to let them know that for her own safety she needed an emergency transfer to other housing.

She was working with one of our advocates to navigate these challenges, as the apartment complex was not responsive to her report about being in danger. Tragically, Mary's abuser was able to make bail and he went directly home to brutally assault her again. This time her injuries were so severe that she was hospitalized, including with a broken jaw. Thankfully, law enforcement arrived quickly on the night of the second offense and they were able to intervene. She believes with certainty, that they saved her life that night. Mary had a significant stay in the hospital, as she was in and out of consciousness and recovering from significant injuries. Upon returning home, Mary received a notice tacked to her door explaining that the apartment complex was filing for eviction against her. Not only did she learn this, but most of the time she had to respond to the eviction had elapsed while she was in the hospital. While Mary did not want to go back to the apartment where she was assaulted, she also knew that having an eviction on her record could compromise her housing subsidy program as well as make it nearly impossible for her to find another landlord to rent to her. Mary received no grace or understanding from the apartment complex.

Mary was not only a victim of abuse by her significant other, but also a victim of circumstance, which may have been prevented had housing protections for victims of domestic violence been in place.

Those who perpetrate domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking rely upon strategies and tactics to limit the options for their victim to seek and preserve safety. If we want safer homes and lives for all people than we must look for ways to increase their options. I believe that housing protections for victims of domestic and sexual violence, stalking and human trafficking is an important step in that direction.

Thank you for your consideration, and I stand for questions.



Michelle McCormick, LMSW
Program Director
YWCA Center for Safety and Empowerment