

Help Protect Victims of Domestic Violence in HUD Shelters Cosponsor HR 2696, the SHIELD Act

Dear Colleague:

Victims of Domestic Violence in federally-funded shelters are at greater risk because of one loophole – HUD’s Homeless Management Information System. HUD programs serving the homeless and victims of domestic violence are required to put users’ personal information into a tracking database to which there is wide access by state, local and federal agencies.

All HUD McKinney-Vento Act Programs, including domestic violence shelters, transitional housing programs, and homeless and emergency shelters are required to input residents’ personal data into the Homeless Management Information Systems Database (HMIS). HMIS was created by HUD in response to the Congressional mandate to collect data on the extent and nature of homelessness in the U.S. and to provide an analysis of the effectiveness of McKinney-Vento Act Programs.

Required data for the HMIS database includes personal identifying information, such as first and last name, Social Security number, date of birth, location, ethnicity and race. HUD has reported that the purpose of collecting such personal information is to avoid duplicative counts of people using various services. However, the disclosure of this personal information is potentially hazardous to victims of domestic violence, especially those who are seeking help.

While domestic violence shelters have been exempted from including name and Social Security number, they still have to supply the remaining personal information. A study from Carenegie Mellon University reported that 53% of the U.S. population are likely to be uniquely identified by only place, gender, and date of birth.

In addition to the federal and state homeless programs and their contractors that have ready access to this information, the HMIS database can be accessed by law enforcement agencies and national security agencies without a warrant. Domestic violence abusers work in all type of professions and many could easily track down their victims because they have access to the HMIS database.

While the collection of data and analysis of homelessness is necessary, the HUD requirement to include personal identifying information is putting victims of domestic violence at greater risk. There are other methods to collect unduplicated counts without jeopardizing the lives of victims of domestic violence.

The Safe Housing Identification Exemption for the Lives of Domestic Violence Victims (SHIELD) Act would exempt the personal information of victims of domestic violence from being inputted into HMIS. Instead, the legislation recommends the use of non-personally identifying information for data collection and statistical purposes.

Please help protect domestic violence victims who have no choice but to turn to our domestic violence, homeless, emergency and transitional housing for shelter. To cosponsor the SHIELD Act please call Reisha Phills of Rep. Moore’s staff at X54572 or email reisha.phills@mail.house.gov or Ryan Work of Rep. Katherine Harris’ staff at X55015 or email ryan.work@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

Gwen S. Moore
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Katherine Harris
MEMBER OF CONGRESS