



Frequently Asked Questions & Answers

Exploited Families Rental Assistance Program Bill

[H.F. 335](#) Authors: Clark (chief-author); [S.F. 311](#) Authors: A. Johnson (chief-author)

1) *How many women and children will this pilot project serve over two years?*

Estimated 120-140 families; 400-500 children.

2) *How did you arrive at this number?*

When gender-based violence became a priority for the Council based on our 2014 community survey, we sat down with a group of survivors to understand their needs and struggle. Every single one of the women in that group expressed hopelessness when it came to housing: they identified housing as their number 1 need right after safety.

The Council then approached the executive directors of the API-led non-profit organizations who are providing advocacy services to victims of domestic violence, trafficking, and etc., to learn from them including gathering aggregate data from them. Organizations such as AWUM, SEWA and HAP identified that over 100 Asian women with children are vulnerable to or are becoming homeless each year due to gender-based violence. This, however, they added, is just the tip of the iceberg. For a number of reasons, women experiencing gender-based violence in this community are invisible and thus, unheard, so this number is really just a baseline.

Based on what we gathered from these organizations, we ran a simple calculation of how much this program would cost if the recipients of this program were eligible for the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) and had no other source of income.

3) *Are there not many housing programs already?*

Yes, currently the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency has funding for several rental housing programs and the ***Department of Human Services has transitional housing program dollars.*** However, it is our understanding that there is no specific funding source or funding program dedicated to serving the survivors of domestic violence and other gender-based violence beyond emergency shelters. Currently, victims of domestic violence have to access their county emergency homeless shelter resources in order to access transitional or supportive housing program. There are 2 to 3 transitional housing programs housed within a few domestic violence shelters; however the need far exceeds the resources available.

4) *Why a silo housing program? And what are the reasons why the Asian Pacific population is not accessing existing resources?*

It is not our intention that every single group should have a separate housing program. The current housing funding system, however, is set up to serve mainly mainstream Minnesotans. Having said this, ***this is not the first time the legislature is creating a housing program targeted***



to serve a specific group. In 2014, the legislature approved funding of the Rental Assistance for Highly Mobile Students Initiative – targeting two neighborhoods. Similarly, there are programs targeted to populations with special needs.

As a community, the Asian Pacific group does not fit neatly into the current housing program. Culture plays a significant role in influencing our help-seeking behaviors. Asian Americans are more likely to access family support and resources instead of approaching counties, the State, and/or the traditional non-profit system for resources despite struggling with unemployment, homelessness, and mental illnesses and/or physical disability. The number of Asian families in emergency homeless shelters is low; the number of Asian individuals accessing housing such as Bridges, and Group Residential Home is low. This is WHY our request in S.F. 311/H.F. 335 is extremely important: ***the Asian Pacific community, as a whole, is a community that has historically been uncomfortable asking for government assistance.***

5) *Is this housing program only for Asian Pacific women?*

No. While we designed this legislation to address the housing need of Asian Pacific and other emerging ethnic community women who are victims of gender-based violence, no woman will be turned away because of race/ethnicity.

6) *Is the program the same as the Safe Harbor housing?*

No, the Safe Harbor Act addresses the needs of youth who have been victims of domestic sex-trafficking. This bill addresses the housing need of families who are at risk of becoming homeless and have been victims of gender-based violence.

7) *Have you shared these bills with MHF? Is the department supporting this bill?*

Yes. Recall that 2016 will be the second try for this bill. In preparing for the 2015 session, we met with Commissioner Tingerthal twice, and DHS twice, to discuss this bill. Since the 2015 session, we have met with Commissioner Tingerthal and her team once to discuss their concerns and recommendations (the latter, which we have attempted to incorporate in this latest version of the bill).

As to the question regarding the respective departments' support, we cannot say; that would be a question only they can answer.

8) *Is this bill taking money away from existing MHFA programs under the Housing Trust Fund?*

No, we are seeking additional dollars from the legislature to add to the Housing Trust Fund to create this pilot project.