



**ASIAN TASK FORCE**  
Against Domestic Violence

# Housing, Public Benefits, and Language Rights

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Legal Advocacy Program

24-hour multilingual helpline

**(617) 338-2355**

[www.atask.org](http://www.atask.org)



# **Legal Advocacy Program**

Our Legal Advocacy Program strives to fill a critical gap in free legal services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault of Asian or Asian-American heritage.

Started in 2009, we have been providing holistic multi-lingual and multi-cultural legal advocacy, representation, and counseling to ATASK clients to help secure their legal rights to become safe and independent individuals, freeing them from patterns of power and control used by abusers.

Our history of collaboration with community-based organizations, law schools, legal services and pro bono attorneys mean that we work diligently to ensure that no survivor is turned away without legal representation, strategic assistance, guidance, or a successful referral.

Disclaimer: The content of this page is for limited informational purposes only and is not legal advice. Before you decide on any course of action, ATASK strongly encourages you to seek the advice of a Massachusetts lawyer to help you analyze your unique and specific situation to find a solution best tailored to your needs.

## **HOUSING & TENANT RIGHTS**

### **If my abuser and I separate, may I stay in my home with my children?**

When you apply for a 209A abuse prevention order, you may request that your abusive partner leave your home temporarily.

A family court judge may also decide who will stay in the marital home long term. Usually, courts will allow the primary parent of children to stay in the home, at least temporarily. Even if your abuser is the listed head-of-household on your lease, the landlord may be required to change it to your name if you can prove abuse.

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### **What happens if I am in danger and I need to move before my rental lease expires?**

In Massachusetts, recent victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, rape or stalking who are still under imminent threat of danger may break a rental lease early without financial penalty, if requested properly. If you do break the lease, you will still be responsible for the months you remain in the apartment until you leave, and any other adult remaining on the lease will still be responsible for the remainder of the lease. You must provide written notice to your landlord that you plan to break your lease due to violence against you. Your landlord has the right to request documentary proof.

You may also request the landlord change the locks and to remove the abuser from the lease.

If you call the police, seek a protection order, or request the locks be changed, the landlord may not retaliate against you by evicting you

You have these rights whether you live in private or public housing, and whether or not you have a written lease.

## Where can I find temporary housing/shelters if I move out?

For a list of shelters, please follow this link:

<http://www.womenshelters.org/cit/ma-boston>

To learn more about shelters near you, you may call **“SafeLink.”**

SafeLink is Massachusetts’ toll-free, multilingual, domestic violence hotline that can access a language line to assist you in your native language. **All SafeLink calls are confidential.**

The SafeLink number is (877) 785-2020.

The SafeLink TTY number for hearing impaired individuals is (877) 521-2601.

SafeLink’s website is: <http://www.casamyrna.org/>

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## What about longer-term housing options?

Casa Myrna’s Transitional Living Program provides longer-term housing where women can stay for approximately 12 to 18 months while they find a permanent home.

Women typically stay a length of 12–14 months, though some can stay for 18 months or longer.

Casa Myrna also has a Teen Parenting Program for pregnant or parenting teens who have been victims of abuse. The typical length of stay at this facility is 12–14 months.

Casa Myrna’s contact info is:

Casa Myrna Vazquez  
P.O. Box 120108  
Boston, MA 02112  
617-338-2350 (Office)  
800-992-2600 (Hotline)

# Where can I find subsidized low-income permanent housing ?

If you are US Citizen or have other immigration status, you may be eligible for a variety of federal housing programs.

The state of Massachusetts also funds & operates some public housing programs that do not require US citizenship or “green card” status. When you contact a public housing development, ask them if they have any such state-funded units.

Some MA state-funded housing programs include:

- State public housing (for families and single individuals)
- Mass. Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) housing vouchers
- Mass. Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) developments (some units are funded by the federal government, so only ask for the ones paid with state money)
- Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP) vouchers (for non-elderly persons with disabilities)

If there is a waitlist, you may be able to be moved to the top of the list if you are eligible for an “emergency” application based on imminent homelessness or based on displacement due to recent domestic violence. Be prepared to show documentation such as restraining orders, medical or police incident reports.

If you are already in public housing, but have to move due to domestic violence, ask to be transferred to another state-paid unit.

If you need to move out of Massachusetts for safety reasons, you will not be able to use this MA service. There are some other special federal housing programs, but there are special application procedures for non-citizens for these programs.

## **INCOME MAINTENANCE/PUBLIC BENEFITS**

### **I depend on my partner for accessing benefits such as health insurance. May I still access my benefits if I separate from my partner/spouse?**

If you are a US citizen or lawful permanent resident and you are very low-income, you may apply for government benefits such as health care coverage or food stamps yourself.

If you don't have a "green card," you may still be eligible for some limited benefits. It is important to speak to an advocate at a domestic violence program or to the Department of Transitional Assistance (offices for your area can be found here

<http://webapps.ehs.state.ma.us/DTAOffices/default.aspx>)

to determine your eligibility.

If your healthcare coverage was previously provided through your spouse through his job, the judge may order that your spouse continue to cover your healthcare insurance needs in some cases.

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### **Are there any public benefits to help me be financially independent of my abusive partner?**

- Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) provides: food assistance, cash assistance, job search assistance, emergency shelters, and domestic violence assistance for US citizens and lawful permanent residents, and some other non-immigrants.
- In order to find out if you are eligible for a particular benefit, you can go to your nearest DTA office to apply. Remember to always keep your denial or approval letters,

## **LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE**

### **What if I do not speak English well? Who may I contact to help me access the police department, the courts, or government agencies?**

Both the police and the court are legally obligated to provide you with a free interpreter. When communicating with the police, you may request an interpreter directly with the police officer. If you are in court, you may request a court interpreter with the court clerk. DTA and public housing agencies often have workers with language skills.

You may also contact us at the Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence for an advocate who speaks your language if you need stabilization and legal assistance.

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### **Are there any legal programs with lawyers or advocates who speak my language?**

Greater Boston Legal Services, Asian Outreach Unit

<http://www.gbls.org/our-work/asian-outreach>

617-371-1234, 800-323-3205 (toll-free), or 617-371-1228 (TDD)

The Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence (ATASK):

<http://www.atask.org/site/>.

617-338-2355

Services from these programs are free for eligible individuals.

# Need more help?

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In an emergency please call 911

Safelink .....	1-877-785-2020
.....	1-877-521-2601
Greater Boston Legal Services .....	617-371-1234
.....	800-323-3205
Legal Advocacy and Resource Center, Inc.....	617-603-1700
.....	800-345-5297
Metro West Legal Services .....	508-620-1830
.....	800-696-1501
Northeast Legal Aid .....	978-458-1465
.....	800-336-2262
National Lawyers Guild .....	617-227-7008
Boston Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service ...	617-742-0625
.....	800-552-7046
Massachusetts Bar Association .....	617-654-0400
.....	866-627-7577



**ATASK** is a domestic violence (DV) agency for pan-Asian victims and survivors in New England, serving clients in 14 Asian languages. Our mission is to prevent domestic violence in Asian families and communities and to provide hope to survivors.

**Boston:**

P.O Box 120108  
Boston, MA 02112  
Tel: (617) 338-2350  
Fax: (617) 338-2354

**Lowell:**

P.O Box 7259  
Lowell, MA 01853  
Tel: (978) 454-3651  
Fax: (978) 937-2355

24-hour multilingual  
domestic violence helpline  
**(617) 338-2355**

Bangla  
Vietnamese  
Cantonese; Mandarin  
Taiwanese  
Indonesian  
Hindi  
Nepali  
Urdu

Thai  
Tagalog (Filipino)  
Mien  
Khmer (Cambodian)  
Japanese  
Korean  
Manipuri

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