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Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

Taking Action to End Poverty

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MEDIA ADVISORY

January 4, 2007

**Safe Homes Act Protects Survivors of Violence
New Illinois Law Allows Victims to Change Locks and End Leases**

(Chicago)—Advocates are looking at the recent passage of the Safe Homes Act as a victory in the first of many steps to make homes a safe place for victims of violence. Effective January 1, 2007, the Safe Homes Act is the first of many steps toward making the homes of domestic and sexual violence victims a safer place.

The Safe Homes Act is necessary to allow victims of domestic and sexual violence to secure safe housing and leave dangerous housing. Before this law, a woman who was raped in her home by someone she did not know could not end her lease early and a victim of domestic violence could not change her locks to keep her abusive boyfriend from reentering her apartment.

“Too often, victims of domestic and sexual violence suffer not only physical and emotional violence but also the devastation of being displaced from their homes because of violence,” says Kate Walz of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. “And sexual assault victims are frequently prohibited from terminating their leases, even in cases where the sexual assault occurred on the premises,” she continued.

The Safe Homes Act now protects the health and safety of survivors of domestic and sexual violence who live in rental and subsidized housing. This law allows tenants and members of their household who are survivors of violence to

- change the locks on an emergency basis to keep the person who attacked them out of their home (for tenants with written leases only) and
- leave their housing and end their lease early to protect their physical safety and emotional well-being (for tenants with written or oral leases).

The Safe Homes Act’s sponsors—Rep. Robin Kelly (D-38) and Sen. Kwame Raoul (D-13)—have committed to continuing discussions on improving the law, particularly as it relates to protecting victims of violence when the perpetrator is a leaseholder.

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The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, a national resource, champions law and policy promoting equal opportunity and support for low-income individuals, families, and communities so that they can escape poverty permanently.