

PRO BONO SPOTLIGHT: HOMELESS ADVOCACY PROJECT

HAP, Landlord Fight to Keep Family in Home

WHEN HOMELESS ADVOCACY PROJECT (HAP) Board Chair Margie Morris, a partner at Reger Rizzo & Darnall LLP, met Patricia at a HAP legal clinic at the Eliza Shirley emergency shelter last summer, Patricia had been notified of her termination from subsidized housing. Thanks to Margie's dedication, which included several days spent in Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) offices waiting for hearing officers to meet with her, Patricia avoided all but certain homelessness.

In Margie's words: Patricia came to the HAP clinic seeking legal assistance as her subsidized housing had been terminated. Patricia lived in "Section 8 housing," which is administered by the PHA. All household adults in subsidized housing must verify their income bi-annually in order to establish continued eligibility and the household share of the rent. Proof of income is satisfied with three current consecutive pay stubs (current is defined as dated within the last 60 days).

Patricia, with a steady job, is paid weekly and has sequential pay stubs. Her daughter's job, however, is "on-call" and she is unable to produce consecutive pay stubs. In October 2013, when the household was up for their review, Patricia provided three consecutive pay stubs along with two from her daughter. Furthermore, Patricia explained her daughter's "on-call" job status and inability to produce three consecutive pay stubs. Patricia was never notified that what she presented was not adequate. Yet in February 2014, PHA paid no rent to the landlord and notified Patricia that she had been terminated from the subsidized housing program for failure to provide three pay stubs to verify household income. Fortunately, the landlord did not immediately seek to evict Patricia for non-payment. He considered Patricia a model tenant and contacted PHA on her behalf.

I contacted PHA to advocate for Patricia on the grounds that her termination was inconsistent with PHA's own procedures. The agency agreed to re-enroll Patricia in the subsidized housing program. When the time for the household's next review approached, I decided to be proactive to avoid a repeat of the previous experience. I confirmed to PHA by email that current pay stubs

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for Patricia and her daughter would be presented at the scheduled review meeting. Patricia attended the review meeting accompanied by our paralegal, Joan. PHA, however, told Patricia that since she has been removed from the program, she needed to re-apply for Section 8 housing all over again and produce 32 documents (including original Social Security card and raised-seal birth certificate) at the next meeting.

Patricia, the landlord and I met with PHA and the agency representative admitted that they "had not really looked at the daughter's proof of income" that had been previously submitted. Since she could not produce the requisite consecutive pay stubs, they agreed that her 2013 W-2 and 2013 federal income tax return would suffice. The landlord offered to obtain the documents from the IRS website at his own cost so that Patricia's tenancy could be ensured. After I attended several additional meetings with PHA, Patricia was officially reinstated to the Section 8 program. She has marked her calendar to gather her pay stubs for her future recertification hearings.

HAP is incredibly grateful to Margie Morris in her efforts to save a mother and daughter from family homelessness. On Thursday, April 9, HAP will celebrate its 25th anniversary by honoring Margie Morris and the 24 former HAP board presidents who have worked so hard to make HAP the success it is today. For information about HAP's Anniversary Benefit from 5:30 to 8 p.m. at Hotel Sofitel Philadelphia on April 9, contact Leonora@haplegal.org.

For More Information

Contact Leonora@haplegal.org for more information about HAP's 25th Anniversary Benefit on April 9.