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**Deval Patrick**

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For Immediate Release - January 03, 2013

**GOVERNOR PATRICK SIGNS LEGISLATION TO PROVIDE HOUSING RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**



*Governor Patrick signs "An Act Relative To Housing Rights for Victims of Domestic Violence, Rape, Sexual Assault and Stalking" in the Governor's Council Chambers. (Photo credit: Eric Haynes / Governor's Office) View full-size [photo](#).*

BOSTON – Thursday, January 3, 2013 – Governor Deval Patrick today joined Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray and housing, public safety, legislative and community based advocacy leaders at the State House to sign S. 2402, "An Act Relative To Housing Rights for Victims of Domestic Violence, Rape, Sexual Assault and Stalking." The legislation will provide housing rights and protections for victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault and stalking.

"We must do all we can to protect victims of sexual and domestic violence," said Governor Patrick. "I thank the Legislature and the many caring advocates for giving us additional tools to do so."

"After facing the emotional and physical trauma of abuse or assault, victims of sexual and domestic violence often struggle with ongoing concern for personal safety, housing instability or potential homelessness if they need to leave their residence," said Lieutenant Governor Murray, who chairs both the Governor's Council to Address Sexual and Domestic Violence and the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness. "By partnering with the legislature and community based advocates, we are helping to improve the safety of victims in their own home and providing opportunities to improve their safety without further financial penalties."

In addition to the challenges of finding safety and maintaining stable housing, victims of sexual and domestic violence often encounter financial and legal barriers if they need to leave their home, even when staying in their home is unsafe. Many victims

also face discrimination from prospective landlords when or if a past history of abuse is known. The legislation signed by the Governor provides victims of these crimes with rights and protections while also protecting the rights of property owners.

"We thank the legislature and the Governor for passage of this bill," said Mary Lauby, Executive Director of Jane Doe Inc. "Inadequate and unsafe housing options contribute to the economic instability that some victims face. This law removes obstacles as it creates new options for rape victims and victims of domestic violence who may need and want such protection."

Among key provisions, S. 2402:

- Establishes a defense to eviction if a landlord attempts to evict a tenant because he/she was the victim of one of these crimes;
- Creates a provision for victims of these crimes, with appropriate documentation, to vacate their lease or rental agreements without financial penalty;
- Provides a provision that allows for victims to have their locks changed

As chair of both the Governor's Council to Address Sexual and Domestic Violence and the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness, Lieutenant Governor Murray convened a joint working group in 2012 to identify more efficient and compassionate ways to support victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in various housing systems. Through this collaborative effort, both councils have worked closely with the legislature and community based advocacy organizations on this initiative and other resources.

"This new law will provide important protections to victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse and stalking by giving them the ability to choose whether to stay in their residences or move without having to weigh their personal safety against financial considerations," said Senator Cynthia Creem.

"I applaud the legislature and the Administration for their hard work and dedication toward the passage of this bill," said Representative Kevin G. Honan. "This law will afford increased protection for victims of domestic violence and their families, and remove obstacles in order to provide greater safety for those in highly vulnerable living situations. These protective measures for individuals and their families are necessary to ensure the physical and mental safety of the residents of Massachusetts. I commend all of the parties that have contributed to the process."

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