

Abusive Rules for a Woman on Welfare... Many Regulations for the Poor

Janet Villafane

Just a few months ago, I was placed in a shelter in Waltham. I am originally from Dorchester. Everything I know is in Dorchester. My family, friends, pastor, my whole support system is in Dorchester. I didn't know anything about Waltham. I had never even heard of it.

My life became a living hell. If it wasn't one thing, it was another. I understand that living in a shelter means there are rules to abide by. However, in this shelter, the rules were abusive.

Curfew was at 9:00 pm. A late warning was a late warning, whether you were one minute late or three hours late. They did room checks and in-

spected our rooms.

They gave us warnings for any little thing they found - from having an empty envelope in your trash to a single toy under your bed. It was crazy! They might as well have given me a warning for breathing!

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All I was thinking about was: "How much longer do I have to stay here?" So I started filling out applications to move, but when I met with my housing worker, she told me to wait until I gave birth. Three months later, I gave birth. My housing worker told me to wait for the birth certificate. After the birth certificate came, she told me to wait for the baby's social security number. I arrived in the shelter in July, and it was already November. Still I was on no waiting list for housing.

I got depressed. There were nights when I would look at my life and all the negativity surrounding me, and I started regretting my daughter. I was losing my sanity. I needed a transfer. So I gathered up letters for Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). They like documentation, so I gave them documentation. I got a letter from my doctor, my counselor, my daughter's pediatrician, and my pastor. I even wrote a letter myself.

I handed it all over to my case manager from the shelter. She said I didn't need a transfer. She wanted me to sign a paper saying I would get all my services from the Waltham shelter. I refused. She said I was jeopardizing my placement. Ten minutes later, my transfer was approved. What would have happened if I had signed the paper? Would it have messed up my transfer?

I needed to be near my support system - my family, my friends, and my church. Finding a church is like finding a family. You can't just replace it. I love my pastors. They know me. Fortunately, I am in a shelter that is closer to my community. The shelter referred me to Project Hope, where I took a college transition class. Now I attend Roxbury Community College.

I'm striving for a better life and to be the best mom I can. I want to set a good example for my daughter. I don't want her to be scared of life but to explore. And when she gets the choice to sit it out or dance, I want her to dance!



Janet Villafane, age 20, has been living in a shelter for more than a year. She is looking for work and hoping to complete the childcare certificate program. Meanwhile, she has a job as a full-time mom. Her daughter keeps her busy, motivated, and happy.

Take it Further

Compare this article to the articles on p. 10 and p. 34. Who is more regulated in this society? Who is less regulated? Why?