



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR
James Skoufis

Senator Skoufis Announces Investigation into Housing Conditions and Code Enforcement in New York State

JAMES SKOUFIS March 8, 2019

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Senator Skoufis Announces Investigation into Housing Conditions and Code Enforcement in New York State

Senator James Skoufis (D-Hudson Valley), Chairman of the New York State Senate Committee on Investigations and Government Operations, has announced an investigation into housing conditions and code enforcement outside of New York City. His investigations unit is specifically examining the following four municipalities: City of Newburgh, Town of Ramapo, City of Mount Vernon, and City of Albany. Skoufis is working with Senator Alessandra Biaggi on the Mount Vernon inquiry and Senator David Carlucci on the Ramapo investigation; both colleagues also serve on the Senate's investigations committee.

Senator Skoufis said, "Every New Yorker deserves the right to rest easy knowing their home is structurally sound and that every first responder can safely and efficiently serve their community. This investigation looks to advance those goals. Our committee will expose slumlords in the four communities we're examining and, just as importantly, identify best practices, determine areas where enforcement can be improved as well as recommend legislative and regulatory changes to create a safer New York State for our residents."

Skoufis' investigation began in early January and continues to gather documents and testimony in the four municipalities. To date, all four municipalities are cooperating with the investigation.

"I applaud Senator Skoufis for opening an investigation into illegal housing across New York State," said Joseph Donat, Newburgh's Interim City Manager. "For decades, illegal housing has been an ongoing problem in the City of Newburgh. I appreciate the Senator for not only acknowledging the severity and urgency of this issue, but for actually doing something about it. We look forward to working alongside Senator Skoufis and his team in finding a solution."

Senator Skoufis stood with Newburgh's local elected officials and code enforcement officers as he announced the investigation. They highlighted the city's efforts at 197 First Street, a property riddled with code violations, fire history, and police activity. They collectively expressed the need to update the state's laws and building code to better deal with bad actors.

Chief Horton, the Assistant Fire Chief and Code Enforcement Officer in Newburgh said, "I thank Senator Skoufis and his team for opening this investigation. Anyone who enters these buildings and families who live in them are put in danger when building codes are not met. The goal of this investigation is to make first responders' jobs safer and more efficient, and families' homes safe, secure, and compliant. I look forward to supporting and helping Senator Skoufis' efforts to accomplish this."

Senator Alessandra Biaggi (D-Bronx/Westchester) said, "It's essential that state government help local governments fulfill their key responsibilities, including enforcing the building codes to keep residents and first responders safe. Our goal is to help Mt. Vernon improve its enforcement and develop best practices and to determine if local governments need additional regulatory support. I thank Senator Skoufis, Chair of the Senate Investigations Committee, for leading this important effort."

Jonathan Jacobson, current Assemblyman and former Newburgh Councilman said, "When the building code is enforced, everyone benefits - neighborhoods are stabilized and property values are maintained or even increased. The state should support municipalities in this essential obligation."

Burke Blackman, Project Manager at the Newburgh Community Land Bank, the company that now owns the 197 First Street property said, "The Newburgh Community Land Bank plays a unique role in community revitalization by stabilizing vacant properties and working collaboratively with the City building and planning departments."

Juanita Lewis, the Hudson Valley Director of Community Voices Heard, “The tenants of Newburgh deserve safe and stable living conditions for their families. We look forward to these investigations and what may come from them.”

Skoufis noted that a hearing is being planned to gather public testimony from all relevant stakeholders. He also indicated a desire to request - if necessary, compel - testimony from slumlords in the four municipalities to answer for their housing conditions. The testimony is meant to gather legislative insight so the investigations committee can advance legislation, as needed.

This is the second investigation Skoufis has opened, the first being an examination of pharmacy benefit manager (PBM) practices. PBMs act as drug pricing middle-men and have come under significant scrutiny during this year's budget negotiations since Skoufis launched the investigation in early January. A third, unannounced investigation is also underway.