



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Daniel L. Squadron

Senator Squadron Adopts Brennan Center Recommendations for Robust Committee Meeting

DANIEL L. SQUADRON May 19, 2009

Cities Committee Undertakes Open

Dialogue on Tenants' Rights Bill

Pilot "Mark-Up Session" is Step Toward Goal of Empowering Committees

Albany, NY—Taking one step toward the goal of empowering committees to debate, amend and shape legislation in Albany, State Senator Daniel Squadron today adopted Brennan Center recommendations for a "mark-up session," allowing open discussion and amendments to a tenant protection bill sponsored by Senator Liz Krueger.

The Brennan Center and other advocates for reform of the legislature have identified the longstanding State Senate committee structure -- in which there is little debate, discussion and modification -- as one barrier to a more functional legislative process. In many legislative bodies, committees play a meaningful role in debating and shaping bills, allowing for a more transparent process that includes rank-and-file members of the legislature.

Following the rules recommended by the Brennan Center, members of the Cities Committee debated and amended S3855, an omnibus tenant protection bill that would allow administrative tribunals to enforce the housing maintenance code and would permit tenants to make repairs themselves, deducting the value from their rent, if building owners do not

fix hazardous conditions.

"Today's pilot mark-up session represents one step toward the reform New York State so desperately needs. We have a long way to go to fix state government, but there is no doubt that active committees doing real work in the light of day will be a big part of the solution," said State Senator Daniel Squadron, Chair of the Committee on Cities.

"I was pleased to have the opportunity to participate in today's markup session, which offers an excellent model for making the Senate's committee process more substantive and deliberative. I welcomed the opportunity to present this important housing legislation, and believe that the amendment process has made a good bill even better," said State Senator Liz Krueger, sponsor of the bill under consideration.

"In the five years that the Brennan Center has been studying the legislative process in Albany and the twelve years that our historical research covers, we have never seen a committee meeting where Senators publicly and substantively discuss and improve a bill under their consideration. We applaud Senator Squadron and the Cities Committee for showing the public and their peers that this can and should be done," said Laura Seago, Research Assistant at the Brennan Center and co-author of the Center's most recent report on the state of the legislative process in Albany.

"We're impressed that the chairman is trying to pursue some new and interesting experiments in his committee. It's an experiment worth pursuing to try to get the members of the committee more involved in the legislative process," said Blair Horner, Legislative Director for the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG).

"Today's committee meeting is one step toward an open, transparent government that truly works for the people of New York. People should have faith that laws are crafted in the open,

with the participation of their elected representatives; today's mark-up session brings us one step closer to removing the veil from state government and letting the sunshine in," said Jessica Wisneski, Legislative Director for Citizen Action of New York.

"The open 'mark-up' session in the Senate Cities Committee is a welcome and long overdue window into the legislative process in Albany. We hope that other Senators and committees will follow the example of the Cities Committee and Senators Squadron and Krueger, and allow the public to observe the way in which bills are amended and changed. This will give the public an opportunity to learn about the policy concerns that must be balanced by their representatives and provide a better understanding of the way the people's business is conducted," said Susan Lerner, Executive Director, Common Cause/NY.

"This is a unique opportunity for the Senate to engage in much-needed open committee work that the League has been calling for for years. We applaud this new openness, giving the public the opportunity to see how committees should function," said Barbara Bartoletti, Legislative Director of the League of Women Voters of New York State.

"It is great to see that a Senate Committee is beginning to function more like an active committee with the mark-up of a bill in the Cities Committee chaired by Senator Squadron. Reform of this kind is just what the system needs to empower and engage individual Senators in the decisions of how the institution functions," said Dick Dadey, Executive Director, Citizens Union of the City of New York.