



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

State Senator Liz Krueger Seeks Restoration of Home Rule Fights to Protect New York City's Affordable Housing

LIZ KRUEGER March 13, 2006

Albany, NY – State Senator Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan) offered a motion to petition today to bring a bill to restore home rule to New York City to the floor of the Senate. The Urstadt Law, named after Charles Urstadt, former Governor Nelson Rockefeller's housing commissioner, was enacted in 1971 as part of Rockefeller's vacancy-decontrol legislation. It specifically barred New York City from adopting rent limitations and protections that are "more stringent or restrictive than those presently in effect." Senator Krueger's motion was defeated.

The legislation (S.2735) proposed by Senator Krueger would repeal the anachronistic Urstadt Law, as well as the 2003 provisions that further curtailed New York City's home rule powers. "By preventing the City of New York from acting to preserve affordable housing, the Urstadt Law is an unconscionable restriction on the democratic home rule of New York City residents," stated Senator Krueger. "It restricts our ability to control our policy and our destiny on a strictly local issue. Residents of New York City are entitled to equal protection."

Since 1971, when home rule over rent and eviction protections was taken away, New York City's housing situation has gone from chronic shortage to acute crisis. According to the 2005 New York City Housing and Vacancy survey, the rental vacancy rate is 3.09%. A vacancy rate of less than 5% creates abnormal market conditions. Rent hardship afflicts poor and middle-class households alike, with half of all New Yorkers paying at or over the federal hardship level of 30% of income on rent, and a fourth of all households paying more than half their income on rent.

“In my twenty years as an advocate for low-income families, I heard the same story over and over again – New Yorkers' having to make the decision to pay for rent over purchasing food for their families,” remarked Senator Krueger. “We now live in a time when homelessness levels are back up to Depression era numbers, emergency food providers can not keep up with demands, and even middle-income, working families find themselves in housing crisis. If we do not start to come up with some real solutions, we will find ourselves in the midst of an un-resolvable catastrophe.”

On February 1st, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn introduced State Legislative Resolution 1 which calls on the Legislature to pass the bills necessary to repeal the Urstadt Law. The Council is expected to approve of the resolution on March 22nd.

During the debate Senator Krueger asked her Republican colleagues to “respect the right of New York City government to make housing decisions on behalf of the eight and a half million people living in the five boroughs.” Unfortunately, most of the Republican Senators

were not in the chamber when Senator Krueger offered her statements, because members are not required to be present for a motion to petition.

Other localities throughout the state are given home rule over issues of local importance. “It is ironic that the Republican Party has historically fancied itself as being the defenders of home-rule actions -- the recognition of the importance of localities determining their local laws,” said Senator Krueger.

“I expected that this motion would be defeated today,” concluded Senator Krueger. “The Democratic Conference will continue to fight to restore home rule, so that elected officials for the City of New York (the Council and the Mayor) can have the authority to adopt a rational set of housing policies which protect the shrinking stock of affordable housing units and can maximize options to increase new apartments.”