



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

Tenants And Lawmakers Join Together to Urge Governor Paterson to Sign Bill to Crackdown on Illegal Hotels

LIZ KRUEGER July 26, 2010

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(New York, NY) On Wednesday, July 21st, State Senator Liz Krueger and Assembly Member Richard Gottfried along with City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Assembly Housing Committee Chairman Vito Lopez, as well as other key elected officials, tenants and housing advocates gathered at City Hall to urge Governor Paterson to sign legislation to enable New York City agencies to enforce the law against illegal hotels and to protect tenants.

The proliferation of illegal hotels has removed thousands of rental apartments from an already tight housing market, disrupted the lives of the permanent residents who live in the buildings, and decreased the City's tax base. Illegal hotels are apartments designated under law as permanent residences but are improperly used as transient hotel rooms.

The bill (S.6873/A.10008), sponsored by State Senator Liz Krueger and Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried, will put an end to the rampant spread of illegal hotels by clarifying ambiguities in State and City laws which have made it impossible for government agencies to effectively crack down on offenders and protect residents. Having passed both houses of the Legislature, the important bill is now in the hands of Governor Paterson.

"It can be a real nightmare when the apartment next door is occupied by one transient after another," said Assembly Member Gottfried. "You have strangers coming and going at all hours, with noise, disruption, and real safety concerns. For years, my office has received countless complaints from tenants living in residential buildings that are being used as hotels."

Landlords rent apartments as hotel rooms to get more money than the rent laws allow, or to empty out a building for a co-op or condo conversion.

"This will be a real win-win for New York City residents and visitors," explained Senator Liz Krueger. "Residents will no longer see their apartment buildings overrun by transient tourists and visitors will no longer have to worry about arriving to find that their 'hotel' is actually an apartment building. Furthermore, because illegal hotels do not comply with the local building, fire, and housing codes required for buildings zoned for transient occupants, they pose a serious threat to public safety."

"We, at the Council, have heard from New Yorkers across all five boroughs that this has long been a problem," New York City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn said. "More and more landlords and corporations have taken it upon themselves to illegally convert apartments and whole buildings into shoddy hotels. We are losing precious affordable housing and creating dangerous conditions for visitors and residents alike. This is not what we want New York City to become – a place where New Yorkers can't call home and a place where tourists don't want to go. I implore Governor Paterson to sign this bill, so that we keep New York the great City it is, a destination for visitors and homes for New Yorkers."

New York City residents have not been the only victims of illegal hotels. Because the internet has made it easier than ever to advertise illegal hotels, most tourists have no idea they have not made reservations at legitimate hotels until they arrive at their destination. Such deception ruins many visitors' experiences and harms New York City's reputation as a tourist-friendly city.

Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer said "This crucial legislation will finally close a dangerous loophole that has afflicted thousands of New Yorkers and tourists for far too long. I call on Governor Paterson to quickly sign this bill to ensure that our City's residential buildings are kept safe from these illegal uses."

"Hostel takeovers' can be a living nightmare for New Yorkers. It's hard to feel safe in your home when anyone with a few bucks' cash can get a key to the front door of your building," said U.S. Representative Carolyn Maloney. "Clearly, we need to take action now to outlaw the conversion of residential apartments into transient hotels. I thank my good friends Senator Krueger and Assemblyman Gottfried for their leadership and hard work to halt the spread of illegal hotels in our City."

"I am proud to have played such an integral role in passing this important legislation," said Assembly Member Vito Lopez. "I appreciate all the residents of Bushwick and Williamsburg and all over the city who reached out to express their concern over this issue and encourage others to reach out. The presence of these illegal hotels creates unsafe conditions, shrinks the available affordable housing opportunities for permanent residents and often disturbs the character of our neighborhoods. As shown by the creation and successful passage of this bill, it is clear that by speaking out about issues, together we can effectuate positive change. I ask Governor Paterson to listen to the wishes of the residents and sign this bill into law."

"For the past five years, I have worked with other elected officials and tenant advocates to fight the intractable proliferation of illegal hotels in my Senate District and across New York City," said State Senator Tom Duane. "This sensible and carefully crafted legislation will finally enable us to effectively shut down dishonest operators, who create hazardous conditions for tourists and permanent residents alike, reduce our affordable housing stock, and undercut the legitimate hotel industry that is such an important part of New York City's economy."

State Senator Daniel Squadron said, "Illegal hotels displace residents, encroach on neighborhoods and lack the fire safety of legitimate hotels. This bill will enable the City to enforce laws protecting residential buildings by closing a loophole that allows illegal hotels to operate. I thank Senator Krueger and Assembly Member Gottfried for their work in passing this important bill, and I urge the Governor to sign it into law."

"New York's residential housing stock should be available for real tenants to rent, instead of transients who are just passing through," Assembly Member Deborah J. Glick said. "This Illegal Hotels legislation will ensure that law-abiding individuals will still be able to sublet their apartments, while at the same preventing pernicious landlords from making a quick dollar at the expense of everyday New Yorkers. Illegal hotels jeopardize the safety and

security of all New Yorkers and simultaneously accelerate the loss of affordable housing. If the Governor truly cares about tenants in New York he should sign this bill immediately."

Assembly Member Jonathan Bing said "Illegal hotels have disrupted the quality of life for many permanent residents, and eroded the affordable housing stock in New York City. I encourage Governor Paterson to sign this important legislation into law and offer New Yorkers refuge from this practice."

"Illegal hotels are a plague on this city," said Assembly Member Micah Z. Kellner. "They drive New Yorkers out of affordable housing and create intolerable conditions for tenants who are forced to share their buildings with transient visitors. This legislation makes it clear that residential housing is meant to be a safe place for tenants, not a way for landlords to generate quick cash by roping in tourists who should be staying at legitimate hotels. I urge Governor Paterson to stand up for New York's tenants and sign this bill."

"My district has been overrun by illegal hotels, which has resulted in a loss of crucial rent-regulated housing for working New Yorkers," said Assembly Member Linda B. Rosenthal. "When I posed as a tourist in one of the many illegal hotels on the Upper West Side, I saw firsthand what the long-term tenants had to deal with: tourists checking in at all times, making noise and traveling freely through all parts of the building that should have been for tenants' use only. We all want as many tourists as possible to visit our city, but illegal hotels encourage landlords to harass and evict longtime tenants and convert their apartments into more profitable operations. Legitimate residents do not deserve to have their homes treated with such disrespect. This important legislation will put a stop to such reprehensible practices."

"I strongly urge Governor Paterson to sign A.10008/S.6873, a bill that stops illegal tourism in residential hotels. This bill is supported by a huge coalition, including tenants, the City of

New York, Local 6 Hotel Trades Council, many elected officials and the tourism industry," said Council Member Gale A. Brewer. "Why? Because these affordable units should house permanent residents; Because while we love tourists, young tourists and permanent residents sharing bathrooms and kitchens is not a good mixture; Because tourists have fun and make noise, and residents have to sleep and go to work in the morning; Because the legislation makes appropriate exceptions for roommates, boarders, and occupants who are temporarily absent. Given Governor Paterson's history as a pro-tenant, pro-affordable housing elected official, I hope that he will honor his past record and sign this legislation."

"This bill will finally put illegal hotels out of business and restore peace and stability to residential buildings," said Council Member Dan Garodnick. "For too long, the operators of illegal hotels have depleted our housing stock, undermined the legitimate hotel industry, deprived the City of millions in tax dollars and made tenants vulnerable to the unwelcome guests next door."

"As if housing wasn't hard enough to find in this City, some landlords are illegally converting their residential buildings into hotels. This hurts their own residents and all New Yorkers. The State Legislature passed a strong bill to stop this practice and it's up to the Governor now to do the right thing and sign it into law," Council Member Jessica Lappin said.

"New Yorkers deserve to live peacefully in their apartment buildings with other permanent residents," said Council Member Rosie Mendez, Chair of the City Council Public Housing Committee. "Living next door to a transient hotel room undermines the feeling of home. We need this law to make sure that government has the power to maintain all the appropriate controls on residential buildings."

"We are excited that the Legislature has passed this important bill that will protect tenants, tourists and our affordable housing stock from the dangerous threat of illegal hotels," said

Jackie Del Valle, of the Housing Conservation Coordinators. "Having an illegal hotel in your building, whether it's one or 20, is unsafe for the tenants who live there."

The bill contains appropriate exceptions for roommates, boarders, etc., who live or rent in the unit with the permanent occupants, or while the permanent occupants are temporarily absent and nothing is being paid. The bill would also give a small number of buildings that have historically operated as hotels prior to the enactment of the Multiple Dwelling Law, or were legally operating as hotels under the pre-1961 zoning, time to comply with relevant building codes for transient use.

"I had to fight to be able to become a permanent tenant in illegal hotel SRO, I underwent a lot of harassment since the landlord did not want me to live there," said Dorothy Williamson, a tenant at 307 West 79th Street in Manhattan. "This bill will make sure that landlords aren't skirting the laws and that affordable housing is able to be used by New Yorkers desperate to find a place to live."

Tenant Organizer, Goddard Riverside SRO Law Project, Yarrow Willman-Cole said "Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units, a last line of affordable housing for many New Yorkers, are frequently converted to illegal hotel units. The potential profits which landlord can make by such illegal conversions provides a strong incentive for such landlords to harass permanent residents out of these buildings. This legislation is crucial for the preservation of SROs, which are often the housing of last resort for many New Yorkers. We ask that the Governor sign this bill in response to the needs of tenants in New York City."