



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senator Serrano Joins Senator Espaillat and Colleagues to Expand Tenant Protections to Keep New Yorkers in their Homes

JOSÉ M. SERRANO February 23, 2011

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(New York, NY) – With rent regulation laws that protect over 1 million units of affordable housing in New York City and the surrounding counties (Westchester, Nassau, and Rockland) dangerously close to expiring, Senate Democrats were joined by City elected officials and advocates to call for the immediate extension and expansion of tenant protections.

To prevent the expiration of rent regulations and the most significant “tenant tax” in the history of New York, which could force over a million New Yorkers from their homes, Senate Democrats are calling for their omnibus tenant protection bill (S.2783-A/ Espaillat) to be included in the SFY 2011-12 budget. The laws governing rent regulation are set to expire on June 15, 2011. Between 1994 and 2010, it is estimated that over 300,000 units of affordable housing were removed from rent regulation.

Senator Adriano Espaillat, Ranking Democrat on the Senate Housing Committee said, “Raising rents on middle-class and poor families that are already struggling in this tough economy is tantamount to a crushing tax that will drive New Yorkers from their homes. That’s why I have introduced legislation strengthening rent control and other crucial regulations that protect tenants and stabilize communities across New York. As elected officials, leaders, and grassroots activists, we stand united in fighting to preserve the millions of homes that might be lost if rent regulations are allowed to expire on June 15th.”

Senator José M. Serrano (D-Bronx/Manhattan) said, “Particularly during these difficult fiscal times, we must establish strong tenant protections to ensure that our hard-working low and middle-income families are not pushed out of their neighborhoods. Establishing rent regulations will help eliminate harassment of tenants by landlords, and preserve the affordable housing on which the residents of our community depend. To protect the vibrancy and diversity of our city, we must enact housing policies that keep people in their homes.”

Senator Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan) said, "For the sake of all New York City residents we must extend and enhance rent regulation, and protect affordable housing. Anyone who believes that the expiration of this legislation will not affect them is sorely mistaken.

Without rent regulation our teachers, waiters, young entrepreneurs and blue collar workers will all be priced out of New York City, losses that would cripple our city. Let us not forget that what makes New York the best city in the world are the diverse cultural fabrics that make-up our neighborhoods. By not extending and enhancing our rent regulation laws we would lose so much more than affordable housing, we would forever lose the New York City we know and love."

Senate Democratic Conference Leader John L. Sampson said, "To maintain our communities, grow our businesses, and keep middle-class families in their homes, we must extend and expand tenant protections. If rent regulations expire over a million New Yorkers could be driven from their homes by a devastating tenant tax. Including tenant protections in the budget process will safeguard tenants and stop an affordable housing crisis from crippling New York.

New York City Public Advocate Bill de Blasio said, "These laws are the only thing standing between our city and the largest affordable housing crisis in this country's history. If we don't act here and now, hundreds of thousands of working and middle class families could lose their homes. We must live up to our historic responsibility to keep the more than million apartments under threat affordable."

Key Components of S. 2783- A/ Espailat:

- Repeals vacancy destabilization and re-regulates most of the apartments that have been lost through this loophole in the last two decades.
- Allows New York City and suburban municipalities to bring former Mitchell-Lama and Section 8 buildings under rent stabilization.

- Reduces the statutory vacancy bonus from 20% to 10%.
- Reforms preferential rent loophole that enables landlords to increase stabilized rents by hundreds of dollars when tenants renew their leases.
- Reforms the provision that allows landlords to empty entire buildings by claiming they need more than one unit for themselves or their family members.
- Reforms the Major Capital Improvement (MCI) program by making rent surcharges temporary and which end when the landlord has recovered the cost of the improvement.
- Reforms the Individual Apartment Improvement (IAI) program by reducing the monthly rent increase from 1/40th to 1/60th of the cost of the improvement.
- Adjusts high-income deregulation thresholds to more accurately represent inflation.
- Repeals the Urstadt Law which would restore home rule powers over rent and eviction legislation to the City of New York.

Mary Tek, spokesperson for the Real Rent Reform campaign, said, "We thank Senator Espaillat for recognizing that our current, weakened rent laws have resulted in the loss of over 300,000 affordable homes for New York's families. We need real rent reform that not only renews rent protections, but also strengthens them by repealing vacancy destabilization. Without these steps, over 1,000,000 families face unsustainable rent hikes leading to increased homelessness, destabilized communities, and the further erosion of New York's economy."

Ana Maria Archila, Executive Director, Make the Road Action Fund, said, "Immigrant renters in New York City confront serious challenges finding safe, decent, and affordable housing. The deregulation of thousands of rent regulated housing units has been disastrous for immigrants, drastically cutting the supply of affordable housing in our communities. We cannot wait any longer. We must repeal vacancy decontrol this year."

Senator Daniel Squadron (D-Brooklyn/Manhattan) said, "More than a million New Yorkers depend on rent regulations to stay in their homes, and New York's neighborhoods depend on the stability that our affordable housing laws provide. We can't risk tenant protections by letting them linger until the frenzied end of the legislative session, when they are on the verge of expiration. We must extend and improve the rent laws by the time the budget is passed, to avoid the devastation and chaos that would result if the laws expire. I will continue to work with my colleagues to ensure that we protect tenants throughout New York."

Senator Tony Avella (D-Bayside) said, "As the former head of a tenants association I fully support extending the rent regulations and especially eliminating vacancy decontrol. Without these regulations millions of residents would be faced with skyrocketing rent increases that would drive tenants from their homes in numbers that would certainly surpass the recent housing market collapse. Extending these regulations and safeguarding tenants from harassment and abuse are imperative to securing a working class residency in New York City."

Senator Velmanette Montgomery (D-Brooklyn) said, "I am proud to stand with my colleagues in calling for renewal and strengthening of our Rent Control laws. New York City is unique because of the variety of our people, and its vibrancy can only be maintained if we can maintain decent housing for all our citizens, at every income level. These economically challenging times mean more people need the protections of Rent Control and Stabilization more than ever!"

Senator José Peralta (D-Queens) said, "Stabilizing the stock of affordable housing and protecting tenants from unscrupulous landlords is especially important at a time when many families are having a particularly hard time making ends meet. As Democrats, we will

not turn our backs on New York's middle class."

Senator Gustavo Rivera (D-Bronx) said, "Affordable housing is part of what has made New York City what it is today by allowing people from throughout the country and the world to find an affordable place to live and a good quality of life. One in every 3 Bronxites is afraid of losing their home and becoming homeless. That's unacceptable. New Yorkers are already being squeezed. There is 13% unemployment in the Bronx and those who do have a job are working hard for the same or less pay while paying more for transportation and housing. That's why the government has to do more – not just extend rent regulations, but strengthen them as well."

Senator Kevin S. Parker (D-Brooklyn) said, "One of New York City's greatest strengths is the diversity of its people, who have come from all corners of the world to be one of us. Rent Regulation and other Tenant protections have preserved the ability of millions of middle class working families to be New Yorkers, and to live in our great city. We must continue to ensure the middle class can live in New York City. Without its vital middle class core of working New Yorkers, our city's culture and economy will collapse, and that is something neither I, nor any of my colleagues, will allow to happen."

Senator Bill Perkins (D-Harlem) said, In New York rent regulation laws protect the security of over one million households- ensuring the economic vitality of the region. To allow these protections to lapse, eliminating our major source of affordable housing, would mean certain disaster - a disaster that's happened before in Boston, in 1995. There the loss of rent control prompted a mass exodus due to unprecedented rent increases and condo conversions.

Section 8 housing was actually undermined because the chance to double and triple rents made Section 8 vouchers unattractive to landlords. Absent rent regulation, New York's gentrification would be worse. By the same token, preserving and enhancing rent

regulations, we can create more desperately needed affordable housing. For the sake of livable, affordable, viable cities, this is what we must do.”

Senator Shirley L. Huntley (D-Jamaica) said, “One of the biggest issues residents face in Southeast Queens, which encompasses much of my 10th senatorial district is finding a suitable and affordable place to live. With New York City having some of the highest rental costs in the nation, families - both low and middle income - are struggling to pay their rents. To remedy this ongoing problem we must take the necessary steps to renew rent laws throughout the state that promote affordable housing. In my district we have over 15,000 rent regulated apartments, which provide families a means to find housing and stay there over a period of time without having to worry about reckless and egregious rent increases. Strengthening and continuing rent regulation laws in New York State will allow residents to feel both confident and secure they will be able to provide a home for their families.”

Senator Eric Adams (D-Brooklyn) said, “It is vital that we halt a trend in which New Yorkers face an unmanageable existence of increasing prices and diminished services. Maintaining affordable rents and protecting the rights of renters through rent regulations are key factors in this effort.”

New York State Assembly Mitchell-Lama Housing Subcommittee Chair Linda B. Rosenthal said, “On June 15, the Emergency Tenant Protection Act expires, and millions of New Yorkers will be placed at risk of losing their homes unless we take action. While then-Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno committed the tactical error of admitting he wanted to abolish rent regulation in 1997, the Senate Republican conference has equally destructive plans for tenants this year. If we allow the policy of vacancy decontrol to continue, our city's remaining affordable housing will eventually disappear. The renewal of the rent laws offers

us the chance to earn a better deal for tenants, but anything less than this will only hasten the loss of affordable housing that has occurred in New York City and its suburbs."

Council Member Inez E. Dickens said, "It is my prayer that all state legislators be they Democrat or Republican will be united in passing and re-authorizing tenant and rent protections. The crisis of a failed economy is still upon us. Many may lose their jobs. Rent protections will help individuals and families stay in their homes. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once echoed, "We can't wait." I also add, "Lives are at stake. We don't need debate. We need to pass tenant, rent protections today."

Council Member Ruben Wills said, "Rent regulations need to be preserved and strengthened. Middle-class and working New Yorkers are being priced out of our city because of vacancy decontrol. New York State's Legislature must take deliberate action to ensure that New York City remains a home for all New Yorkers."

Council Member Gale A. Brewer said, "I support the extension and expansion of rent regulation housing for many reasons, and one of them is that rent regulated units are occupied by middle-income and working-class New Yorkers. They are the backbone of our PTA's, Community Boards, civic groups, block associations, and the fabric of our communities. We should not lose one more unit of rent regulated housing, and I will continue to advocate wholeheartedly for tenant sponsored legislation in Albany."

Other elected officials also joined the call for immediate action and expressed their support for the Senate Democrats' rent reform proposal, including New York State Assembly Members Hakeem Jeffries, Brian Kavanaugh and Francisco Moya, as well as New York City Council Members Robert Jackson and Ydanis Rodriguez

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