



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Daniel L. Squadron

## Squadron, Kavanagh, Quinn, Tenants Rally for Rent Guidelines Board Reform Ahead of Annual Vote

DANIEL L. SQUADRON April 16, 2012

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### **Squadron-Kavanagh Legislation Would Require Council Approval of RGB Appointments, Ensure More Accessible and Diverse Board**

NEW YORK – Today, State Senator Daniel Squadron, Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh, City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn, Tenants & Neighbors, the Real Rent Reform coalition, elected officials, and tenants from around the City rallied to urge passage of state legislation to reform the Rent Guidelines Board (RGB), ahead of the RGB's annual vote to adjust rents

this spring.

The legislation (S741A / A6394B), sponsored by Senator Squadron and Assemblymember Kavanagh, would require City Council confirmation of the Mayor's appointees to the RGB, bringing necessary checks and balances to the system and making the appointment process more democratic.

The bill would also make more New Yorkers eligible to serve as public members and ensure that diversified views are represented on the RGB by including new professions among those qualified for appointment. Qualification for appointment would include experience in public service, philanthropy, social services, urban planning, architecture, social sciences, non-profit, finance, economics, or housing; currently, only experience in finance, economics, or housing qualifies someone for appointment.

The New York City Rent Guidelines Board establishes rent adjustments for the approximately one million units subject to the Rent Stabilization Law in the City. It is scheduled to meet on Thursday and throughout the following weeks to hear testimony and vote on this year's adjustment.

"The RGB's decisions dramatically impact the lives of millions of New Yorkers and the very future of our city. Yet it lacks the checks and balances that should go hand-in-hand with such serious responsibility," said **State Senator Daniel Squadron**. "By requiring Council approval of appointments to the RGB and broadening qualification for membership, we can create necessary accountability, ensure a variety of voices are represented on the board, and better protect the affordability that has made New York the vibrant and diverse city it is today. Thank you to my colleagues in government, Tenants & Neighbors, and all of the New Yorkers here today to fight for this pragmatic and necessary reform."

“In our democratic system, requiring advice and consent of a legislative body is a way of ensuring that those appointed to important government positions by the executive have an opportunity to discuss their qualifications and their approach to their duties in a public forum before their service begins,” said **Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh**, who has pushed legislation to reform the RGB appointment process since 2009. “The Rent Guidelines Board is an extraordinarily important public body whose decisions affect the daily lives of literally millions of New Yorkers. We believe that requiring advice and consent of the City Council for appointments will improve the quality of the appointees, promote greater deliberation about the values that are at stake in the RGB’s work, and increase public trust in the process. I’d like to thank Speaker Quinn and Senator Squadron for their commitment to advancing this important legislation, as well as Senator Toby Stavisky with whom we’ve worked on a similar bill, Assembly Housing Committee Chair Vito Lopez for his support in placing our bill on this week’s committee agenda, and of course Tenants & Neighbors and all the tenant activists who are calling for us to get this modest reform enacted this year.”

"I want to thank Senator Squadron and Assembly Member Kavanagh for sponsoring this important legislation that will make the Rent Guidelines Board more inclusive and grant the City Council the power to confirm its appointees," said **Speaker Christine C. Quinn**. "The Rent Guidelines Board is charged with enormous responsibility and this bill provides critical measures to ensure the most qualified candidates serve in these roles. I'm proud to support the legislation."

“Serving on the RGB is a grave responsibility. The decision that the board makes each year about what the rent adjustments for rent stabilized tenants will be has tremendous economic implications for over two million New Yorkers, and for the continued economic and racial diversity of our city,” said **Maggie Russell-Ciardi, Executive Director of Tenants and Neighbors**. “We need to be sure that whoever sits on that board approaches their work with

rigor, earnestness, and with a deep sense of accountability to the people who will be impacted by their decision. This bill will help us move in that direction, and will help ensure that tenants' active participation in the annual RGB process doesn't feel like an exercise in futility."

"The RGB is failing to protect NYC tenants from unaffordable rents. A majority of rent stabilized tenants are not able to afford their apartments, based on the HUD benchmark for housing affordability," said **Adriene Holder, a Tenant Member of the Rent Guidelines Board**. "In just the past 3 years alone, over 40,000 more tenant households or over 100,000 people now have rents that are unaffordable to them. This is astounding. We have never seen this type of increase in such a short time in the history of the RGB."

"We need a Rent Guidelines Board that represents the interests of the working and poor tenants of New York City and which can be held accountable to the impact of its policies and decisions on rent setting and tenant protections," said **Damaris Reyes, Executive Director of Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES)**. "The current system of Mayoral appointees with no New York City Council oversight has failed to protect the communities from gentrification and displacement."

"We support this bill because it expands the qualifications of the public members. Currently public members are considered qualified only if they have a background in finance, economics or housing. The majority of the current public members come from the financial world. We believe the public would be better served with members drawn from more diverse backgrounds," said **Ellen Davidson, Staff Attorney at The Legal Aid Society**.

"The existing process for determining rent increases for New York City's rent-stabilized apartments is fundamentally flawed and has allowed landlords to unfairly squeeze working and middle-class New Yorkers year after year," said **State Senator Liz Krueger**. "This bill

introduces needed reforms, bringing us a major step closer to a Rent Guidelines Board that can guarantee increases are decided after a full discussion and based on landlords' real expenses."

"Every year, without fail, the Rent Guideline Broad approves of rent increases over the vociferous objections of New Yorkers," said **Council Member Margaret Chin**. "It is time the members of the RGB are elected in a fair, transparent manner that ensures the makeup of the Broad is a true reflection of our City. I want to thank Senator Squadron, Assemblymember Kavanagh , and Speaker Quinn for spearheading this important piece of legislation."

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