



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Tony Avella

Avella Stands WITH Queens Civic Congress to Oppose Mayor's Efforts to Legalize Basement Apartments

TONY AVELLA May 5, 2014

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NEWS

Queens Senator Tony Avella Opposes Mayor de Blasio's Senate District

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LEASE:

(BAYSIDE, Queens) On Friday, Senator Tony Avella stood with Mr. Richard Hellenbrecht, President of the Queens Civic Congress in addition to civic leaders in the area to oppose Mayor de Blasio's plan to legalize basement apartments and "granny flats" throughout the City of New York. "Granny flats" usually refer to a part of a house made into self-contained accommodations.

Mayor de Blasio has referenced this proposal as part of his Safe, Affordable NY vision plan during the mayoral campaign and may include the proposal in the Affordable Housing Plan which he plans to roll out this week. The proposal will aim to bring these illegal apartments into the regulated housing system, ensure they meet legal standards for safety, and work to bring them under rent-regulation.

Although there is an affordable housing crisis in the City of New York, legalizing these apartments, which present significant fire and health hazards, is simply not the answer. Rather than legalizing these units, the City should focus on preventing such rentals, which are only cheaper in price because they are not in compliance with Building and Zoning codes.

“For decades, we have fought the City of New York to do more in terms of enforcement against illegal basements,” said Senator Avella. “So it is very disconcerting to hear that the Mayor wants to undermine the entire City zoning and building code to legalize these units. There is a reason why these apartments are illegal – they are NOT safe. How many situations have we come across where the units caught on fire and resulted in fatalities because of illegal occupancy? Legalizing these units also creates substandard housing and certainly does not solve the affordable housing issue in the City of New York. We very much want to create affordable housing and increase the opportunities for people to have a safe apartment in this City. But to turn the City zoning and building code on its head to allow the legalization of basement apartments is just simply unacceptable. We truly hope that the Mayor, when he announces his much awaited housing plan, does not include legalizing these units.”

Mr. Hellenbrecht stated, “I was shocked to hear during the campaign that then candidate de Blasio planned to legalize illegal basement apartments. The primary concern of the hundred civic and block associations, condo and coop groups and historical societies that Queens Civic Congress represents is neighborhood preservation and stabilization. We have very serious concerns: first - for the safety of residents in basement apartments; and secondly for the impacts of crowding on quality of life issues in our low density residential areas. Traffic, parking, schools, water and sewers, sanitation and crime are all impacted by cramming more people into buildings not designed for apartments. We certainly hope that he drops this proposal as he moves forward and if he doesn't, we will fight it all the way till the end.”

Mr. Henry Euler, First Vice President of the Auburndale Improvement Association, stated, “There are so many things wrong with this proposal and so many reasons why this should not go through. But in addition to that, legalizing these basements does not mean that they will provide more affordable housing. People who own the homes can charge any rent they want, especially if these units become legal. After finding out about this proposal, I decided to write a resolution for Community Board 11, of which I am a member, to formally oppose legalizing basement apartments. The resolution was approved by 41 of the members, showing wide spread opposition to the plan.”

Mr. Bob Harris of the West Cunnigham Civic Association stated, “We already have a very big problem with basement apartments being used for University students in our neighborhood. If this proposal goes through, these areas will have even more illegal apartments which are a potential fire hazard and not only a danger for the people who live there but also a danger for the firemen who will have to respond to emergencies.”

Mr. Frank Toner, President of the Rocky Hill Civic Association stated, “When I first heard about this plan, I thought that this is just like sub standard housing. Would the Mayor come out and say that he wants to build more sub standard housing because he need more housing? You are going to be putting people in basements with all the safety risks that exist not just for them but for the homeowners and adjacent property owners as well. Another problem is having to re-do the rezoning that we just finished working so hard to implement. It took us eight years to get it done right and now that we’ve done the zoning that makes sense for our area, something like this would completely destroy it. This proposal just does not make sense to our community.”

Mr. Michael Feiner, President of the Bayside Hills Civic Association stated, “I’ve been in the Bayside Hills Civic Association for 35 years and the reason why I joined was because of a flood in my basement. A basement is no place for someone to live and zoning regulations are in place for a reason. There is no logical reason for what the Mayor is trying to do for this particular community. I strongly oppose the plan and will be asking my members to formally oppose it at the next Civic Association meeting.”

Also in attendance to oppose the Mayor’s plan were the Broadway Flushing Homeowners Association, Queens Colony Civic Association, Fresh Meadows Homeowner Association, Bellerose Commonwealth Civic Association, Kew Gardens Hills Civic Association, Hillcrest Estates Civic Association as well as the Glen Oaks Village.