



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

## Press Release: Time is Running out for Rent-Control Renewal: Legislators, Tenants & Activists Speak Out

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS June 5, 2015

| ISSUE: **HOUSING**



Yonkers, NY - Senate Democratic Leader, State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and Assemblymembers Shelley Mayer and J. Gary Pretlow were joined by tenants and tenant advocates today in calling on Governor Cuomo and the Republican Senate to renew and strengthen rent regulations that are set to expire on June 15, 2015. With more than 25,000 rent stabilized units in Westchester, with 16,000 of those in Yonkers. That number has been reduced from almost 32,000 in 1997, elected leaders, tenants and tenant advocates gathered to

press for stronger laws to protect tenants and prevent further loss of affordable housing. Strengthening and renewing tenant protections will help keep thousands of families in affordable homes in their own communities.

Senate Democratic Conference Leader, State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, said, "New York has always been a state where people from all walks of life can set down roots and build strong, stable and diverse communities including here in Yonkers. We need to pass the Tenant Protection Act of 2015, to protect middle class and low wage New Yorkers who risk being pushed out of their affordable homes by rent deregulation and expiring protections."

Assemblyman Gary Pretlow, leader of the Westchester state delegation, said, "I am pleased to join my legislative colleagues, advocates and tenants in calling for renewal and strengthening of the laws governing rent controlled and stabilized units. We must do more to ensure residents in Mt. Vernon, Yonkers, and across New York have a safe affordable place to call home."

Assemblymember Mayer said, "Too many Yonkers residents spend far too much of their income on housing. I am pleased the Assembly passed and Senate Democratic Conference introduced strong packages to ensure residents in Yonkers and across New York State have safe affordable housing. The continued economic struggles of so many tenants require that we do more to strengthen the laws to ensure we grow the number of affordable housing units."

Assemblyman Steve Otis said, "It is vitally important that we strengthen our laws that protect tenants and the security of their homes. We have already passed legislation in the Assembly to accomplish this. Today, I join with my colleagues in calling for an immediate renewal and strengthening of our state's tenant protection laws."

The Democratic-led Assembly has passed an omnibus bill A7576. Among other things, this bill strengthens protections for suburban counties by repealing vacancy deregulation and reforming provisions surrounding Major Capital Improvements (MCI) by making the MCI rent increase surcharge temporary, disappearing once the landlord has recovered the cost of the improvement, and capping the annual collectability at 6 percent, similar to New York City, rather than the current 15 percent cap.

The Republican-led Senate has yet to act. Last month, the Senate Democratic Conference, led by Senator Stewart-Cousins, introduced a package of bills that if passed would: repeal vacancy decontrol, which removes apartments from rent regulations once the unit is vacant and the legal rent for the next tenant would be \$2,500 or more; repeal provisions permitting rent increases of 20% or more upon vacancy of a rent stabilized dwelling unit; and reform provisions surrounding Major Capital Improvements (MCIs) to ensure they do not become part of the tenants' rent in perpetuity.

Dennis Hanratty, Executive Director Mount Vernon United Tenants, said, "The State's Rent and Eviction Laws (Rent Control & ETPA) provide the most cost-effective system of affordable housing for Westchester's communities. They provide tens of thousands of families with the security of knowing that their rents will not be arbitrarily raised to levels that will force them into homelessness. This is a huge benefit, not only to the families who are protected, but to the larger Westchester community that is not ultimately burdened by having to assume the emergency shelter costs that housing the homeless requires. These laws help provide stability to families, to buildings and to whole neighborhoods. To keep these laws functioning as per their initial legislative intent, it is imperative that they be strengthened to undo some of the most egregious weakening amendments from prior renewals, most especially by eliminating 'vacancy decontrol.'"

Joe Mayhew, Secretary/Treasurer, Communications Workers of America Local 1103, said, "The Communications Workers of America is very concerned with the shortage of affordable housing in downstate NY due to the so-called 'vacancy decontrol' provisions that were inserted into state law by the legislature and Governor in 1993 and 1997. Low- and middle-income families, as well as retirees, are being squeezed out of the cities, towns and neighborhoods where they work and have made their homes. Today, the pace of decontrol has accelerated in some cases by unscrupulous landlords who harass tenants in order to create vacancies and then use vacancy decontrol provision to deregulate apartments. CWA urges the Senate, Assembly and Governor to strengthen rent regulation and protect hard working and retired families."

"It is important that Governor Cuomo make strengthening the rent laws a priority for New York State. Housing is a right and it should be treated as such. We need to save every affordable unit in the state, not take it away and then force people into an unknown future," said Gloria Jordan, Community Voices Heard leader and Grandparent Advocate.

Ellie Treistman, a Yonkers tenant in a rent stabilized apartment, explained, "It is absolutely imperative that we reexamine and a rebalance the rent stabilization laws. Landlords are provided perpetual incremental rental increases of a minimum of 2 - 3%, plus additional reimbursement from MCIs, which further push rent-stabilized rents to market rate level and above. In many instances, the apartments have not received any form of improvement in over 25 or 30 years - but rent is MCI-increased to reflect a long overdue boiler repair, roof or window replacement, blacktopping, etc. After satisfaction of these debts, the tenants are shackled with them forever, while the landlords just pocket the money and receive annual increases to boot. The 2008 economic upheaval caused catastrophic loss of businesses and unemployment of the middle class; permanently altering the lives of masses of unemployed tenants to date. A \$50,000 salary in 2008 can no longer be obtained by the same qualified

worker, who now has to settle for a \$15 an hour job, if one can be had at all. But the MCI increases remain in effect ad infinitum, making the base rent higher and inflating the annual percentage increase as well. If there is no employment and a halving of the salaries for jobs in many industries, why should housing rental costs continue to escalate against an economy which cannot support it?"

The legislative session is scheduled to conclude June 17th.