



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Skoufis

## Senate Passes Code Enforcement Legislation Based on Skoufis' Report

JESSICA GULOTTA February 13, 2020

| ISSUE: **CODE ENFORCEMENT, ILLEGAL HOUSING**

Senator James Skoufis (D-Hudson Valley) announced that yesterday, as a result of his six-month investigation into code enforcement across the State, the Senate Majority advanced sweeping legislation based on recommendations in this report. The legislation focuses on improving safety and creating effective oversight by addressing specific code enforcement failures outlined in the investigation.

Skoufis' investigation took a comprehensive look at the full lifecycle of the code enforcement process, as well as a close examination of four municipalities: the City of Newburgh, Town of Ramapo, City of Mount Vernon, and the City of Albany. The investigative team held a public hearing in the City of Newburgh, the first of its kind, to hear directly from key stakeholders from across the state. Additionally, they heard testimony from representatives from each municipality, first responders, the Department of State, landlords, and tenants. The investigation found a systematic failure to prioritize code enforcement across New York State, creating an unsafe environment for residents and first responders, and concluded that code enforcement must be a top priority for all levels of government. Also, three weeks ago, the Senate Investigations and Government Operations Committee and the Senate Housing Committee held a joint public hearing on this

forthcoming package of legislation to hear from stakeholders.

**Senator James Skoufis, Chair of the Senate Investigations and Government Operations Committee** said, "I'm delighted that as a result of our investigation into housing and code enforcement across the state, the state Senate passed this package of legislation aimed at prioritizing and reforming how we enforce building code. When I started chairing the investigations committee, I was very clear about my goal to ensure that we produce substantive investigations that will have an actual impact on New Yorkers. The passage of this legislation is a demonstration of just that. I look forward to continuing to produce robust, meaningful reports that benefit the people of this state."

**Rabbi Justin Schwartz, Chairman of the Rockland County Illegal Housing Task Force** said, "On behalf of the Rockland County Illegal Housing Taskforce, we are so thankful for Senator James Skoufis. He kept his word by making code enforcement a priority and forcing the entire Legislature to look at this issue for the first time with the seriousness that it requires. These bills will help save both first responders and residents alike. By taking this action, the deaths of New York firefighters from the 'Black Sunday' tragedy won't be in vain. Finally, we are going to be able to get municipalities to do what they're supposed to."

**City of Newburgh Fire Chief William Horton** said, "I thank Senator Skoufis and his team for opening this investigation and pushing the Legislature to develop new legislation from the findings. When building codes are not met, anyone who enters these buildings - families and first responders - are put in danger. I look forward to continuing to support Senator Skoufis' efforts to improve on existing building and fire safety codes and the means in which they are enforced throughout the State."

A breakdown on the package of legislation:

**Prohibiting the Use of Plywood:** This bill, [S.1726A](#), sponsored by Senator James Skoufis, will prohibit the use of plywood, wood composite, wood veneer, or similar wood-based products to board up vacant abandoned properties.

**Municipal Authority:** This bill, [S.7301](#), sponsored by Senator James Skoufis, will provide additional lower court judicial authority to make it easier for municipalities to address violations of the building and fire prevention code.

**Creation of Residential Rental Registry:** This bill, [S.7288A](#), will create a statewide residential rental registry to provide information relating to rental units including code violations.

**Increases State Code Enforcement:** This bill, [S.7287](#), will increase the state code enforcement powers of the secretary of state by establishing a separate state code enforcement office headed by an ombudsperson.

**Penalties for Dangerous Apartment Alterations:** This bill, [S.1714](#), creates penalties on building owners of up to \$7,500 for violations of the uniform fire prevention and building code that impedes egress during a fire or other emergency evacuation.

**Building Code Penalties:** This bill, [S.4938](#), will enhance pre-existing building code penalties for repeat offenders of State uniform fire prevention and building code.

**Fire Extinguisher Requirements:** This bill, [S.2813A](#), will require fire extinguishers to be placed on each floor of all rental apartment buildings.

**Time Restrictions for Court Issued Consent Orders:** This bill, [S.3320](#), will establish time restrictions for court-issued consent orders for work performance to remove or remedy dangerous conditions or building code violations.

**Fines for Code Violations:** This bill, [S.7292A](#), imposes escalating fines for code violations and illegal conversions.

**Code Enforcement Training and Certification:** This bill, [S.7291](#), will increase the minimum standards for training and certification for code enforcement personnel.

Under Senator Skoufis' chairmanship, the Investigations and Government Operations Committee has been course-corrected to finally undertake real investigations and produce meaningful and substantive oversight that New Yorkers will benefit from.

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