



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

Column: Small Landlords Deserve To Be Heard

PAMELA HELMING November 5, 2021



Governor Hochul recently signed two new laws increasing protections for tenants in New York State. There continues to be a lot of talk in Albany about protecting tenants. Certainly, no one wants to see tenants who are genuinely struggling lose their homes.

But there is little talk in Albany about protecting small mom-and-pop property owners who have been hit hard by the state's misguided eviction moratorium and delayed rental assistance programs.

Housing is a two-way street. We also need to support small business landlords if we want to preserve quality, locally-owned housing in our communities and ensure residents have safe and reliable places to live. This is as true for upstate New York as it is for downstate New York.

In the press release announcing the signing of these bills, one Democratic Senator from New York City said, “Bad landlords beware...” And therein lies part of the problem.

Instead of being recognized for their hard work in providing safe and secure housing throughout New York State, landlords are made to be the “bad guys” by some elected officials and advocate groups.

We need to turn this thinking around and acknowledge the work and goodwill of our small landlords. Without their commitment to maintaining beloved neighborhoods through the preservation of their rental properties, we risk losing valuable housing stock and the unique character of our communities.

No one wants to see locally-owned properties forced to be sold to out-of-state investment firms. Or brownstones and walk-ups torn down and rebuilt as standard issue government housing. Imagine what New York City would look like. Imagine what our small town Main Streets would look like.

Local landlords provide much of the rental properties and affordable homes in our communities. Many have gone months without being paid by tenants, some for over a year. Yet they still have to pay for their own obligations, such as property taxes, mortgage payments, and maintenance costs.

Recently, I met with members of the New York City-based Small Property Owners of New York (SPONY). What I learned after listening to them is that upstate and downstate property

owners face similar issues and share common goals. Many of them own properties that have been in their family for generations. Many of them are women and minority-owned small businesses. They have a strong commitment and deep connections to the neighborhoods where their buildings are located.

Small property owners pay taxes that help fund municipal budgets and the essential services residents rely on. Furthermore, they invest their money locally, hire local tradespeople and service providers, and contribute significantly to the economic vitality of our communities.

Many small landlords I've spoken with have described the state's eviction moratorium as a monster, devouring their life savings and diminishing the equity they've worked hard to build.

Deb Hall is a small property owner and administrator of the Finger Lakes Landlords Association. She has been a staunch advocate for the region's landlords. Deb said, "Small landlords, who are private, non-corporate property owners, have borne the financial weight associated with eviction moratoriums and the lag in rental assistance funding. The rental housing industry is suffering from a multitude of factors related to pandemic and pre-pandemic legislation, especially for low to medium income tenants and landlords."

A small property owner from Chinatown said, "We are humans in the care of humans, but we are not magicians. We need to be stable and made whole, but time is running out for us. We're hardworking small business owners who have our own bills to pay, and we struggle in tough economic times, just like everyone else."

A small property owner downstate added, "Governor Hochul says the eviction moratorium has been a lifeline for those put in impossible financial situations due to COVID, but she only means renters. The same concern does not apply to owners, especially those that had cases

that predated the pandemic.”

Small landlords are simply asking to be treated fairly and they deserve to be heard by New York’s elected leaders.

From Buffalo to the Bronx, we need our small property owners to help meet the long-term housing needs of people in our communities. Landlords are not the bad guys, and neither are tenants. We need both to have thriving neighborhoods and communities.