

H.907

An act relating to improving rental housing safety

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. 3 V.S.A. § 2477 is added to read:

§ 2477. RESIDENTIAL RENTAL HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

(a)(1) The Department of Housing and Community Development shall create the Residential Rental Housing Advisory Board consisting of 11 members, each of whom shall be a resident of Vermont and shall be appointed by the Commissioner of the Department, as follows:

(A) three members representing landlords, one of whom is a for-profit landlord and one of whom represents a nonprofit housing provider;

(B) three members representing tenants;

(C) three members representing municipalities; and

(D) two members of the public.

(2) A member shall serve a term of three years.

(3) The Board shall annually elect a chair from among its members.

(4) A majority of the Board shall constitute a quorum for transacting business.

(5) The Board shall take action by a majority vote of the members present and voting.

(b) The Board shall be staffed by the Department, which, along with the Departments of Health and of Public Safety, shall provide support to the Board as required.

(c) The Board shall have the following powers and duties:

(1) to act as an advisory group to the Governor, General Assembly, and appropriate State agencies on issues related to residential rental housing statutes, policies, and regulations;

(2) to report regularly to the Vermont Housing Council on its deliberations and recommendations;

(3) to work with appropriate State agencies on developing adequate data on the location and condition of Vermont's rental housing stock;

(4) to provide guidance to the State on the implementation of programs, policies, and regulations better to support decent, safe, and sanitary housing, including recommendations for incentives and programs to assist landlords with building repairs;

(5) to provide information to community partners, municipalities, landlords, and tenants, including educational materials on applicable rental housing statutes, regulations, and ordinances; and

(6) in preparation for a natural disaster, to collect information regarding available resources, disaster-related information, and community needs, and, in the event of a natural disaster, work with government authorities in charge of disaster response and communication.

Sec. 2. TASKS OF RESIDENTIAL RENTAL HOUSING ADVISORY

BOARD

On or before January 15, 2019, the Residential Rental Housing Advisory Board created in 3 V.S.A. § 2477 shall consider, and if it deems appropriate shall submit to the General Assembly recommendations for legislation concerning the following issues:

(1) whether to retain or modify current statutory provisions for issuance of health orders for violations of a rental housing health code;

(2) whether inspection reports should utilize a hazard index rating system similar to that used by the Department of Public Safety's Division of Fire Safety to standardize timelines for repair and amounts of fines, and whether landlords or tenants should have to submit an action plan for correcting the violations within the time limit for repair;

(3) whether a landlord or tenant should be allowed to appeal an inspection report to address habitability issues; and

(4) whether the local health officer should file a report of violation in the land records as a lien on the property if a landlord does not comply with the inspection report.

Sec. 3. IMPROVING EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL HEALTH OFFICERS;

REPORT

(a) On or before January 15, 2019, the Department of Health, with input from the Residential Rental Housing Advisory Board, shall provide a report to

the General Assembly with preliminary recommendations and a plan on how to improve the effectiveness of local health officers and the enforcement of Vermont residential rental housing and habitability statutes and regulations. The report shall include recommendations for regional approaches to housing code enforcement and for funding.

(b) The Department shall develop a system for keeping data about the type and number of complaints concerning violations of the rental safety codes.

(c) The Department shall assign a person to be in charge of providing assistance to local health officers in their duties and make the name and contact information of that person available on request.

Sec. 4. 18 V.S.A. § 602a is amended to read:

§ 602a. DUTIES OF LOCAL HEALTH OFFICERS

(a) A local health officer, within his or her jurisdiction, shall:

(1) upon request of a landlord or tenant, or upon receipt of information regarding a condition that may be a public health hazard, conduct an investigation;

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Sec. 5. 18 V.S.A. § 603 is added to read:

§ 603. RENTAL HOUSING SAFETY; INSPECTION REPORTS

(a)(1) When conducting an investigation of rental housing, a local health officer:

(A) shall issue a written inspection report on the rental property using the protocols for implementing the Rental Housing Health Code of the Department or the municipality, in the case of a municipality that has established a code enforcement office, which report shall:

(i) contain findings of fact that serve as the basis of one or more violations;

(ii) specify the requirements and timelines necessary to correct a violation; and

(iii) prohibit the landlord from renting the affected unit to a new tenant until the violation is corrected;

(B) may impose a fine of not more than \$100.00 per day for each violation that is not corrected by the date provided; and

(C) shall provide a copy of the inspection report to the landlord and any tenants affected by a violation by delivering the report electronically, in person, by first class mail, or by leaving a copy at each unit affected by the deficiency.

(2) If an entire property is affected by a violation, the local health officer shall post a copy of the inspection report in a common area of the property and include a prominent notice that the report shall not be removed until authorized by the local health officer.

(b) If a local health officer fails to conduct an investigation pursuant to section 602a of this title or fails to issue an inspection report pursuant to this

section, a landlord or tenant may request that the Department, at its discretion, conduct an investigation or contact the local board of health to take action.

Sec. 6. 32 V.S.A. § 6069 is amended to read:

§ 6069. LANDLORD CERTIFICATE

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(f) Annually, on or before October 31, the Department shall prepare and make available to a member of the public upon request a database in the form of a sortable spreadsheet that contains the following information for each rental unit for which the Department received a certificate pursuant to this section:

- (1) name of owner or landlord;
- (2) mailing address of landlord;
- (3) location of rental unit;
- (4) type of rental unit;
- (5) number of units in building; and
- (6) School Property Account Number.

Sec. 7. EFFECTIVE DATES

- (a) This section and Sec. 1 (advisory board) shall take effect on passage.
- (b) The remaining sections shall take effect on July 1, 2018.