

S. 163 - Rental Housing Health and Safety (Sec 1 – 7)

Submitted by Sarah Carpenter, Chair of the Vermont Rental Housing Advisory Board

Sec. 1-7 of S. 163 are from the recommendations from the Rental Housing Advisory Board (RHAB), a very balanced committee, set up last year to again deal with the issue of rental housing health and safety, and the housing health code enforcement that is now the burden of each individual municipality. You will find all the background and work of RHAB on the ACCD website under [Act 188](#).

The residential rental business is a significant part of Vermont's economy. According to Census Bureau's **in 2017 an estimated \$900 million was paid in rents for 78,000 homes in Vermont, but this business operates in absence of any centralized oversight or licensing requirements.**

The burden of ensuring Vermonters have access to livable and healthy rental housing falls squarely on Vermont municipalities who in most cases use volunteer health officers to take this on. The RHAB and previous studies have found this woefully inadequate. **State government must take a much more proactive role in the oversight of rental housing habitability.**

This bill proposes some transitional steps to developing a more professionalized system for the oversight of rental housing health and safety:

- There are a number of provisions in the bill to support towns and continue the process of making housing code inspections more professional, however the volunteer town health officers need more support in this.
- One of the most important parts of the bill is that the **Dept. of Health would explicitly serve as the leader in the state on issue of rental housing health laws**. This will begin to focus the issues.
- This bill asks the Department of Health and the Department of Public Safety to develop recommendations for the design and implementation of a comprehensive system for the professional enforcement of State rental housing health and safety laws to be presented to you next January. Part of this will be completing a needs assessment with data from towns.
- The bill asks for an appropriation of \$150,000 (half of what the RHAB board suggested.) We heard in our public hearings how abandoned many towns felt and recommended two FTE's as well as more legal assistance. The original bill was amended to delete a legislative requirement that DHCD implement a rental housing data collection, so there is less need for IT support now. However, there is still a critical need for a small amount of funding for an interagency (user friendly) web site that puts in one place all of the responsibilities for rental housing health and safety that are overseen by many different agencies (Health, Public Safety, Public Service, ANR, DHCD, as well as lead, energy and environmental laws).

At a minimum the Dept. of Health needs \$100,000 for one additional FTE

to provide increased support to towns. Right now, the state puts virtually no funding into this.

Not funding this will penalize towns as well as landlords and tenants. What other statewide program of health policy, codes and requirements relies primarily on volunteers?

The RHAB also strongly recommended that incentives and support be given to landlords for repairs, as is being proposed in the Rental Housing Incentive Program, Sec. 12 of S. 163.

Thank you for your consideration.