

From: Kaomi Taylor Mitchell
Sent: Wednesday, April 28, 2021 12:35 PM
Subject: Testimony on S. 79

Hello Esteemed Members of the Committee,

I wanted to share with you some thoughts about S. 79. Please see below the text of a letter I shared with Chair Stevens today. Thank you for your consideration and all your hard work this session.

Dear [Committee Members]:

I [have asked about] an opportunity to speak before your committee because there is no shortage of professional lobbyists advocating year-round to Vermont legislators from chambers of commerce, housing organizations and agencies about restricting short-term rentals, whereas the voice of rental owners is typically disembodied and disaggregate, placing us at a relative disadvantage.

My concerns center on owner-occupied room rentals being legally conflated with other rentals. Renting out a spare room in an owner-occupied home is completely different from being an absentee landlord. They create vastly different implications for neighborhoods, visitors and the rental market. The two should not be conflated in S.79 or any piece of legislation. **I am advocating a carveout for rental spaces of 1000 sq ft or less in a building where the owner is in residence.**

The overreach of the legislation in its current state will harm hundreds if not thousands of economically vulnerable people. According to Airbnb's research, most AirBNBs are hosted by women. In Vermont, 26% of Airbnb hosts are senior citizens. (*Source: Airbnb's published research.*) Owner-operators are making four or low five figures, not the millions of dollars realized by absentee owners of 20-unit buildings. They shouldn't be subject to the same financial and time-intensive requirements.

Public safety concerns of my rental are no greater than those of any private home. As a homeowner I can share my guest room for free with countless rotating people so long as I comply with VT's current public safety guidelines. I can even list it on Couchsurfing.com and invite traveling strangers for free. Money being the only differentiating factor reveals that this bill is mistaking a commerce difference for a safety one.

This bill unnecessarily duplicates existing data collection by the state to compile a list that already exists. Short term rentals in Vermont are already legally mandated to register with and pay an annual fee to the Secretary of State in order to pay Room and Meals Tax. If a distribution channel is needed to communicate with short-term rental owners, Vermont can easily achieve this via existing mechanisms such as the Secretary of State, Department of Tax, Airbnb, VRBO, general news, and the VTSTRA.

Short term rental owners in Vermont are also legally mandated to post health and safety information, review and self-certify a list of best practices provided by the state, and allow DOH inspection. This bill adds nothing but layers of bureaucracy and expense unsustainable for part-time residence sharers. Of course that's exactly what some of the advocates behind this type of legislation hope, that overloading minor entrepreneurs with bureaucracy will drive them out of business and eliminate their competition.

That would be a real loss for Vermont's tourism industry. Services like Airbnb and VRBO are an exceedingly potent asset to Vermont's tourism quality. Since guests choose accommodations based on reviews and any host not making consistently high marks is quickly banned from those platforms, hosts like me can't rely on brand marketing to cover up our flaws. **We have only actual consumer experiences to promote our brand, which pretty much guarantees we're the most responsive, responsible hosts in Vermont.**

I believe you and the committee can easily achieve the goals you are hoping for while protecting small owner-occupied properties. Happy to discuss further or help brainstorm alternative ways of achieving the state's housing and safety goals without unduly harming economically vulnerable homeowners for inconsequential gains.

Thank you,
Kaomi (Karen)
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