



## Vermont League of Cities & Towns

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Memo

Date: June 23, 2021

To: Members of the Senate

From: Karen Horn, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy

Re: S.79, An Act to Improve Rental Housing Health and Safety

I am writing on behalf of the 246 member cities and towns of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns to urge you to vote to pass S.79, the rental housing bill that is being returned to you from the House. Vermonters who rent housing, either as tenants or landlords, need to be confident that the enforcement of rental housing standards is not only well-intentioned but also conducted by individuals with expertise in housing inspection and enforcement of rental housing health codes.

Enforcement of the Rental Housing Health Code is currently the responsibility of the local health officer who is recommended by the selectboard and appointed by the Commissioner of Health. In the event no local health officer is appointed, the chair of the selectboard is the designated health officer. Local health officers are mostly volunteers and have no particular expertise in the health, safety, sanitation, and fitness for habitation standards designed to ensure that Vermonters have access to adequate housing, or in the applicability of pertinent laws. Those laws address sewage and septic systems, lead paint, animal control, drinking water safety, insect and rodent infestation, hazardous spills, asbestos, and air quality. Needless to say, the time and complexity of addressing rental housing complaints often far exceeds volunteer local health officers' ability to ensure deficiencies are corrected.

S.79 would finally establish a new system for rental housing inspections. It would transfer authority for enforcement of the Rental Housing Health Code to the Fire Safety Division of the Department of Public Safety, except in those municipalities with established rental housing inspection programs that agree to continue that program. The bill would authorize five new professional positions at the Fire Safety Division to conduct rental housing inspections statewide.

Please vote to pass S.79. Thank you for your commitment to local government.