

Thank you, Chair Stevens and members of this committee, for taking the time to hear my testimony on H. 21 Utility Disconnection and Landlord Notification.

H. 21 was introduced to this committee in my first term of the 2019 Session. At that time, the bill was referred to as H.762 and focused only on a requirement where the owner of a rental property would be notified any time that electrical services to the property was disconnected and that notice to the landlord would be notified even if the tenant was the rate payer. H. 762 would only be referred to this Committee and no actions were taken. As I recall, I had a conversation with Chair Stevens in which he suggested that I not simply focus on the electric service disconnections but expand with other services.

In the 2021 session, this bill would again be reintroduced as H. 612 and would be referred to the Committee on Energy and Technology. I did take Chair Stevens' advice and expanded the bill to include services beyond electricity to include gas, water, and sewer in which again the landlord would be notified. In addition, the bill's purpose was to "promote safety. protect property and provide assistance to tenants" as needed. No actions were taken by the Committee on Energy and Technology.

Now here we are with H. 21 which has been referred to your committee. This bill is the same as the previous H. 612 that was introduced in the 2021 session. The original idea for this bill came from a constituent that was a landlord in my hometown. The landlord had discovered that one of his tenants had recently had their utilities disconnected. The tenant was using cans of Sterno for cooking which left unattended could have produced a fire. This situation at its worse could have caused other tenants within the building to have lost their belongings, their home and potentially their lives. The landlord would also have suffered the loss of the property and its income source.

I believe that in most cases, landlords do their best to look after their property and their tenants. It is simply good property management for a landlord to be knowledgeable of what is going on within their property, which is not just for the good of the property, but also for the safety of all the tenants that may be housed within that facility.

One further item that I had not considered when H. 21 was being drafted was an issue that a Johanna Polsenberg from Standard brought to my attention. It concerns the utility companies and how they levy charges. A tenant who owes monies to a large utility company for services rendered would be responsible for settling or closing the account. That record of non-payment would follow the tenant. This is not the case for some municipal owned electric companies such as Hardwick Electric or Barton Electric. In this case the landlord/property owner would be responsible for payment of the bill and not the tenant and ultimately it is related to the leases that the utility companies have on file. On Wednesday, Jan 25, I spoke to members of the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA), that had a display in the Card Room. They confirmed that in some cases through leases between the power company and landlords, that this scenario was correct. This committee might want to confirm this information with a call to the Director of Public Affairs Officer, Julia Leopold whose direct number is 802.884.4488 or by cell 802.595.9633.

In summation, H. 21 addresses only safety and property management issues. This committee may want to look further into the concern of who is ultimately responsible for payment of services rendered to utility companies which might justify notifying a landlord prior to utilities being disconnected to a rental property.

Thank you for your time,

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