

Dear Members of the House General Committee:

I am one of those rare, proverbial "Mom and Pop" landlords. I own my 1850 farmhouse which has been converted into three apartments. I live in one of the apartments and rent out the other two. I'm also a lawyer who believes in due process and that, to protect the public interest, businesses need to be regulated.

As you consider H.772, please prioritize housing stability and due process. Faster and easier evictions cause homelessness. Vermont is in the middle of a housing crisis. Rushing eviction cases, limiting defenses, and eliminating jury trials undermines truth-finding by our courts and contributes to Vermont's housing crisis. The fact a person, such as a landlord, alleges some wrong does not make it so. If a landlord has an urgent need to stop a tenant behavior, such as criminal activity, our legal system has a process just for that: temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction. Finding the truth in a dispute is what courts are for. But they need time to do it. Don't shortchange that process.

I'm a very small landlord. I own three apartments, one of which I live in. I strongly support rent stabilization and tenant protections in H.772, including limits on excessive rent increases, reasonable security deposit caps, the end to hidden fees, habitability defenses, and keeping eviction records confidential until judgment. My rents are within Section 8 HUD fair market rates. I charge one month's rent as security deposit. I have no hidden or other fees. There is no reason for these excessive practices.

Like all landlords, I have had to pay someone to clean and paint after tenants move out. I have had to replace furnaces, the well pump, and stoves and refrigerators. I have had to let tenants in who are locked out. I have had to pump out the basement and have it cleaned after flooding. That is what the business of renting homes to others looks like. Being a landlord requires minimal work and cost. If a landlord can't accept that minimal burden, they should find a business better suited to their needs.

I also urge you to end, or at least provide a very long notice period, a year, for "no cause" evictions. No one should lose their home for no reason at all. If they must, they should have ample time to plan, particularly in this crazy market. If my only reason to evict someone has nothing to do with any fault of the tenant, there is no reason that eviction needs to happen quickly. No harm is being done; rent is being paid. What's the hurry?

But the ability to evict for no reason at all does immense harm. The ability to evict a tenant for no reason at all means that tenants are afraid to assert their legitimate, lawful right to homes that are safe and free of discrimination and harassment. The ability to evict for no reason at all renders meaningless every theoretical right tenants have.

I'm so tired of hearing that being a landlord in Vermont is difficult and that evicting a tenant in Vermont takes too long. Both are patently untrue. Being a landlord is the easiest gig I've ever had. There's a reason that renting out homes to others is referred to as "passive" income. Yes, just as in every other business, small or large, there are laws that one must follow. Occasionally that means one must hire a competent lawyer. The need to occasionally hire a competent lawyer is a cost of every business.

I'm a landlord. Being a landlord is easy. Evicting a tenant for cause is already easy and fast. There is no need to reduce tenant protections or to increase the speed of evictions. To other landlords complaining about the business they chose to work in I say: stop complaining and do a better job running your business.

zi ask you to protect the provisions in H.772 that prevent eviction and oppose those that strip tenants of time, due process, and stability. Don't make Vermont's housing crisis worse. Help solve it.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rachel Batterson  
Huntington | Chittenden County