



Testimony of  
Pennsylvania Residential Owners Association ( PROA )

Senate Committee on Urban Affairs and Housing  
October 23, 2013

Good Morning, My name is Rita Dallago. I serve as the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Residential Owners Association ( PROA ). I am also a rental housing provider and a Real Estate Broker/Appraiser. I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you today on Senator Williams legislation, SB 48. This bill further defines the obligations and penalties for landlords and responsibility of tenants.

PROA is comprised of 20+ local associations throughout Pennsylvania. We have approximately 8,000 rental housing providers. Many of which are small "Mom & Pop", family held businesses doing their own management, often on a very narrow financial margin.

We believe that SB 48 is a common sense approach to addressing an all too prevalent situation. Although Act 129 of 2012 gave good rules for procedure in specific situations, we still have the instances when a tenant vacates a unit without notice, leaving no forwarding address, has taken clothing, food, toiletries and most furnishings. This situation is not specifically defined in Act 129.

Typically, a landlord is not going to inspect a unit without cause. If the tenant is behind in the rent, a neighbor reported that the tenant vacated the unit, the landlord or neighbor hears running water or another emergency maintenance issue, the landlord has reason to visit the unit.

A reasonable person, upon finding no food, clothing, toiletries, utilities turned off, perhaps mail forwarded, will conclude that the tenant has vacated the unit. Giving the tenant a written notice, asking for a response is a reasonable step. The landlord is not just going in and discarding the left behind personal property. However, communication is two ways. A landlord needs to notify the tenant, and the tenant needs to respond. We understand the concern for when a tenant needs to leave the unit temporarily in an emergency situation. Isn't it reasonable to expect them to notify the landlord? Even when they are in a safe haven, a caseworker will make the notification for them. Typically landlords are easy to locate, they are in the rental housing business. A note can be mailed to the same address as the rent payment or request for repairs.

When the landlord needs to file for possession through due process, the fees are a few hundred dollars, and the time the unit is vacant is extended. This adds dollars to the cost of running the unit. Dollars that are passed on to the next tenants since they are a cost of doing business. In an effort to maintain affordable rental housing, we need to minimize the amount of extra dollars that are attached to the cost of maintaining units.

We feel that SB 48 gives good rules for the above situations, treating both parties reasonably. We feel that these rules are necessary so that a landlord knows how to proceed, and a tenant knows what to expect. This gives uniform rules to be used throughout Pennsylvania.

Again, I thank you for listening to the thoughts and concerns of PROA on this bill. We are interested in your questions and discussion on our position.