

There is still time to find common ground on quality housing

BY KELLY DEMATTEO

With just a few weeks left in the legislative session, the debate over housing policies — rightly — has been in focus. And despite the bumper-sticker politics that has pushed the legislature's Housing Committee to pass mislabeled and misguided proposals that would erode the quality and supply of multifamily housing, there is still time to heed the call of Gov. Ned Lamont — and the Republican-American's editorial board (as it argued in the March 10 editorial, "Finding common ground") — to come together to boost Connecticut's supply of quality, affordable living that works for every budget.

We couldn't agree more. The Connecticut Apartment Association (CTAA), my company and our fellow members are housing providers, representing over 67,000 apartment homes in Connecticut. We work every day to help Connecticut's individuals and families find — and stay in — quality, affordable rental living. Success for us is creating stable, safe communities and having resi-

dents renew their leases when they come to an end.

Senate Bill 143 would destabilize apartment living and undercut the supply of housing when Connecticut needs it most. Every lease is a contract — with a mutually agreed start and end date. When a contract ends, both parties have the opportunity to choose to renew.

No housing provider or renter wants to be in an eviction situation, and "lapse-of-time" situations are rare. They are also a very important tool used as a last resort to protect our communities from disruptive and dangerous situations that may be created by some residents.

These situations can be improper or illegal activity ranging from damaged property to illegal substance use and other lease violations that — without action — present unsafe conditions for those who live and work there.

According to 2023 data from the Connecticut Judicial Branch, lapse-of-time nonrenewals are a small percentage of total evictions, used only 9% in Waterbury, and less than 12% statewide.

The Republican-American has it right: Connecticut has a shortage of affordable housing, and in any other industry facing such a supply shortage, policymakers would be finding ways to understand the forces behind the shortage and take steps to spur greater supply.

SB 143 would compromise the quality of today's available rental housing and discourage property owners from staying in or entering the rental market or investing in additional properties, diminishing the housing supply, worsening existing shortages and driving up rental prices.

Vermont Gov. Phil Scott vetoed a similar bill two years ago, saying: "By eliminating a property owner's ability to end a lease agreement at the time of the mutually agreed upon end date within a lease, this 'just cause eviction' law effectively creates the potential for perpetual tenancy."

Astonishingly, it was only learned in the hearing that the Connecticut bill would convey these same rights to unauthorized "squatters" who never signed a lease in the first

place — a problem that has already beset New York City.

Housing providers and residents have rights and responsibilities to one another, and we all need transparency and consistency in the renting process to foster strong relationships and trust. There should be accountability from both parties on lease compliance so everyone knows, is protected by and benefits from the rules. That's what lease contracts provide.

Connecticut's apartment owners and operators want long-term residents and strive to avoid turnover — especially in the instances of eviction — when possible. That is why we are at the State Capitol, talking to members of the House and Senate about working with us to reject SB 143 and find the "common ground" that your paper spoke of.

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