

* * * Rental Housing Study * * *

Sec. 22. RENTAL HOUSING SAFETY AND HABITABILITY STUDY

(a) Legislative purpose and intent. It is the intent of the general assembly to provide for rental housing safety and habitability. A safe rental housing study committee is hereby established to achieve all the following goals:

- (1) Promote the health and safety of the citizens of Vermont.
- (2) Facilitate compliance with existing health and safety standards.
- (3) Provide support to municipal health officers.
- (4) Create a resource for tenants and landlords.
- (5) Enable communities to focus on problem properties.
- (6) Encourage a private sector response to a public health and safety need.
- (7) Reduce fire fatalities.
- (8) Establish a statewide rental housing inspection system.

(b) Safe rental housing study committee. A safe rental housing study committee is created to consist of the following 14 members:

- (1) The director of the division of fire safety, or designee.
- (2) The commissioner of the department of health, or designee.
- (3) The commissioner of the department of housing and community affairs, or designee.
- (4) The attorney general, or designee.
- (5) The executive director of the Vermont housing finance agency, or designee.
- (6) A representative of commercial landlords.
- (7) A representative of nonprofit landlords.

(8) A tenant representative.

(9) A municipal inspection program representative.

(10) A town health officer from a municipality without an exempt program.

(11) A regional revolving loan fund representative.

(12) An architect.

(13) The executive director of the Vermont state housing authority, or designee.

(14) A representative of the coalition of Vermont firefighters.

(c) Appointment of members. The speaker of the house and the senate president pro tempore shall appoint members of the committee and shall designate a chair by July 1, 2008.

(d) Duties. Before January 15, 2010, the committee shall review and consider:

(1) The development of a simplified rental housing code, to include lead safety, habitability, and basic life safety standards.

(2) A priority for inspections based on factors including: the age of the rental unit, a score of the rental units' self-assessment, and complaints from rental units at the address.

(3) Procedures for scheduled, complaint-based, emergency and time-of-sale inspections, including a time frame and a priority for scheduled inspections.

(4) Standards for licensed rental housing inspectors to include:

(A) Training standards.

(B) A code of professional ethics.

(C) Curriculum outlines and a delivery mechanism.

(5) A funding structure necessary and appropriate to implement the inspection program.

(6) A procedure for issuing a certificate of habitability.

(7) Procedures to assure enforcement and compliance.

(8) Recommendations regarding the role of town health officers in regard to safe rental housing.

(9) Training and education resources for landlords and tenants, including all the following:

(A) A rental housing code self-assessment checklist.

(B) A central resource for rental unit owners and managers that provides:

(i) Lead safety, minimum housing habitability, and basic life safety standards available from one site.

(ii) Coordinated training across disciplines for owners and managers of rental housing units.

(10) Incentives and development of a process for municipalities to establish an inspection program.

(11) An implementation schedule, to begin July 1, 2010, that provides for the commencement of inspections beginning January 1, 2011.

(12) Staffing levels necessary to establish and maintain the program and provide for enforcement.

(13) An appropriation sufficient to fund the certification program, licensing, complaint-driven inspections, and enforcement.

(14) A system for coordinating appropriate displacement services.

(15) A program and the identification of resources for repair and improvement.

(e) Reports. The committee shall submit an interim report on its progress to date on or before January 15, 2009 to the house committee on general, housing and military affairs and the senate committee on economic development, housing and general affairs. The committee shall submit a final written report on its findings on or before January 15, 2010 to the house committee on general, housing and military affairs and the senate committee on economic development, housing and general affairs.

(f) Appropriation. In fiscal year 2009, there is appropriated from the general fund to the department of public safety the amount of \$30,000.00 to be used by the department for the purpose of assisting the rental housing safety and habitability study committee in carrying out its duties.