

# Fewer inspections will hurt tenants

When someone looks for an apartment as a residence, a potential tenant does it with the sense that they will be living in a safe and healthy apartment. The first impression often is good. But what happens after they move in and find cracks forming in the wall or floorboards becoming loose?

Most tenants will not need to worry: The landlord or a repair person will fix the problem. But there are landlords who will show an apartment, collect the security deposit, collect the rent, and then let conditions deteriorate. No matter how many calls are made to the landlord, or a management company, those requests may be ignored.

In Orange and other local municipalities, tenants have the support of code enforcement personnel and contractors who inspect apartments more frequently than state inspections, which occur once every five years. In the case of Orange, inspections by the city are conducted annually.

Making its way through the state Legislature, however, is a bill that would take control of inspections from municipalities and hand them to state personnel or municipal staff contracted by the state. We believe that would have a detrimental effect on the many tenants in Orange and nearby.

Within the bill, the municipal option for regular inspections conducted more frequently than those by the state would be eliminated. Municipal officials still could respond to a tenant's health and safety problems, such as mold or rodent infestation, and order their remediation, but general inspections would occur on the state timetable of just once every five years. This, however, might hurt tenants who are afraid to complain to officials for fear of eviction. In those cases, an annual inspection of each apartment might bring to light any problems without jeopardizing the tenant.

Code enforcement staff still will be able to inspect a residence when there is a change of tenant. Imagine, however, how much can occur to the walls, floors and plumbing during the five-year interval between state inspections. This is asking for trouble.

Proponents say the bill, should it become law, will accomplish two things: it would remove an overlap of state and local laws that landlords now have to follow, plus reduce landlords' expenses by eliminating local inspections, which they pay for. The state Office of Legislative Services, in its analysis of the bill, said the measure would reduce revenues for municipalities; however, it should also result in decreased expenses, mainly in personnel.

Among the sponsors in the Assembly is Mila Jasey, one of the two members who represent Orange in the 27th Legislative District. Tenants should contact her office and ask her to reconsider her support for this bill. While most landlords are conscientious, this is a potentially dangerous measure for tenants who may be left to fend for themselves when a landlord ignores their complaints.

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