

Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs

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Senate Unanimously Approves Bill to Fight Blight

The Senate unanimously approved legislation to help municipalities prevent blight and remediate abandoned properties.

Senate Bill 900, sponsored by State Senator David G. Argall (R-29), would hold property owners accountable for the costs to secure, remediate or demolish blighted structures. The bill would also expedite the process of prosecuting owners of blighted properties and give municipalities the authority to go after the financial assets of negligent owners. This was the first time legislation of this kind has been approved by either the House or Senate.

"I introduced this bill 13 months ago to continue the work of my predecessor, Senator Rhoades," said Argall. "This is far from the original legislation he introduced 3 years ago but the goal is still the same, the elimination of blight in the areas that he and I grew up in, and I am happy with the product that we have sent to the House."

Senate Bill 900 would allow for the extradition of out-of-state property owners who have housing code violations pending against them.

In addition, the bill would permit local governments to deny permits to owners of blighted properties, and develop an education program for judges and district magistrates relating to blighted and abandoned property. The legislation would also create county housing courts to fight blight at the local level.

Argall's legislation was based on the findings and recommendations of the Blight Task Force, a statewide coalition of housing and municipal organizations dedicated to tackling the problems of blighted and abandoned buildings across Pennsylvania first established by Senator Rhoades. Senate Bill 900 now goes to the House of Representatives for its consideration.

The following is the text of an e-mail sent to Senators before the vote on SB 900 by the late Senator Rhoades' son, Jim Rhoades, Jr.

You all know the history. This started with my Dad.

You're hearing from organizations that oppose SB900. The bankers don't like it. Well, I'm sorry, but my sympathy for them is blinded by the blight I see right outside the front door of my house. They shouldn't make loans to people who can't afford it! SB900 is not the same as the old SB1291. You stripped out the statewide database, so the privacy people can take a seat. Some say the Property Conservatorship Act does the same – read it, it does not. SB900 and conservatorship need to work together to give municipalities the tools to fight property blight.

Bottom line. This does not hurt the good people doing the right thing. It only helps us go after the bad guys committing this economic crime stealing value from adjacent properties and taking tax revenue from your municipalities. Imagine that, you can increase municipal revenue through a "yes" vote on SB900 – pretty nice at budget time.

I am a civil/environmental engineer dealing with the negative aspects of blight with my municipal clients every day. I'm also forced to deal with it at home with my family. I tried to get the dilapidated property next to my house - to stop the shingles and pieces of wood from falling on my house – to protect my children. A slum lord from New York owns it and the Borough cannot get him to bring it up to code or demolish it.

I'd love to call you all too personally request support. But I promised my kids I'd be home early today to pack our camper for this weekend. You all know this deserves to get passed. It's not perfect, but my Dad taught me that nothing in life is. SB900 is a step in the right direction. Please honor my Dad by voting yes on SB900.

Thank You and God Bless,
Jim Rhoades, Jr.