

SENATOR DAVID G. ARGALL

Senate Box 203029

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Or Current Resident



Legislative UPDATE

*Fighting Blight in Our Older Communities
In Order to Improve Our Local Job Climate*

From State Senator David G. Argall

SEPTEMBER 2010



Dear Friends:

I am writing today to ask for your guidance. When I was elected as your local State Senator after the tragic loss of Senator Jim Rhoades, one of the very first tasks I was asked to address was to reintroduce Jim's "anti-blight" bill that he had been working on in 2008. My staff and I, along with many local community volunteers, have worked very hard to pass this legislation – hard work which finally resulted in the unanimous 50-0 vote of approval in the State Senate in July.

Now, this legislation is under consideration in the State House of Representatives. My goal is to have this bill approved by both the House and the Governor before the current session ends in November so that this important legislation can finally become law.

To do this, I need your help. Could you please review this questionnaire and return it to me before September 15? I am hopeful that the answers to this questionnaire will be helpful in encouraging the State House to move quickly on this issue.

A description of the bill is included below. Again, thank you for your consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding this or any other state-related matter.

Sincerely,

State Senator Dave Argall
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Senate Bill 900: The Anti-Blight Bill

WHAT IS IT?

Blight is a serious problem that affects almost every neighborhood in our older towns, not only in Schuylkill County, but also across the Commonwealth. Blight is a problem in both urban and rural areas that hurts local efforts to bring new jobs to our communities. While a vast majority of landowners and landlords in the state take good care of their property, there are still those that do not. Some property owners care only about the money they can pocket before their buildings fall into a state of disrepair. In addition, in many cases, these property owners leave a number of unpaid utility bills and tax liens against the property when they eventually abandon it.

Under current law, the taxpayer often 'foots the bill' for blight.

Blighted or abandoned buildings also reduce the property values of neighboring properties and serve as a danger to children who play near these structures. As a coal region kid who loved to explore abandoned buildings, there was never a shortage of opportunities for me. Abandoned buildings also serve as a hotbed for illegal activities and are a frequent target of arsonists that eventually increase municipal costs for fire and police, needlessly placing all of us in danger.

Senate Bill 900, known as the Neighborhood Reclamation and Revitalization Act, is a bipartisan bill that would make sweeping changes to how municipalities deal with blight. Originally



Senator Rhoades and I announced the introduction of anti-blight legislation, the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act, at a Harrisburg press conference in 2008.



The latest version, Senate Bill 900, was introduced to the public in 2009 in front of a blighted structure in Port Carbon, just two blocks from the apartment where I lived with my parents as a first-grader.

introduced by my predecessor Senator Rhoades, this legislation would give municipalities more tools to prosecute owners of blighted properties and more authority to seize the assets of negligent owners.

Senate Bill 900 holds property owners responsible for the municipal costs to secure, remediate or demolish blighted structures, removing this burden from local taxpayers.

This bill would also develop an education program for judges and district magistrates related to blighted and abandoned property enforcement, as well as give counties the ability to create 'housing courts' to fight blight at the local level. It would also give municipalities the authority to extradite property owners from other states back to Pennsylvania in order to hold them accountable for problem properties.

Through the efforts of the Statewide 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, this comprehensive legislation has been designed to eliminate blight in our communities. Revitalizing our older communities through the elimination of blight and promoting genuine, common-sense economic development is a building block to future success. Fighting blight helps us to attract the jobs of the future. In this economy, nothing is more important to this area than good-paying jobs for the people of this region.

SENATE BILL 900 – Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Is 'blight' a problem in your municipality?

2. Do you think Senate Bill 900 will help your local elected officials deal with the problem?

3. What additional suggestions do you have to further combat this problem?
