

House Republican Press Release

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Rep. Greene: Bill Limiting Criminal Checks on Applicants for Public Housing Threatens Law-Abiding Tenants



Lawmaker's Testimony Highlights Opposition from Seymour Housing Authority & Seymour 1st Selectman

Legislation that would limit criminal background checks on applicants for public housing could mean individuals with prior convictions for violent crimes or illegal drug sales will be allowed to move into Seymour Housing Authority rental units and endanger law-abiding tenants, state Representative Len Greene told the state legislature's Select Committee on Housing today.

The measure (Senate Bill 350) would require housing authorities to consider only convictions for Class A felonies that occurred no more than five years before an individual files an application for public housing when the authority renders a decision on a potential tenant.

Under the bill's original language, housing authorities would have been allowed to consider "crimes of physical violence to persons or property, crimes involving the illegal manufacture, sale, distribution or use of, or possession with intent to manufacture, sell, use or distribute, a controlled substance, or other criminal acts which would adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of other tenants" in deciding on applications to become public housing tenants.

In testimony before the state legislature's Select Committee on Housing, Representative Greene cited opposition to the bill from the Seymour Housing Authority and Seymour First Selectman Robert J. Koskelowski, adding the legislation would "leave the authority and its residents unnecessarily vulnerable."

"The original language of the bill sought to protect the health, safety and welfare of our public housing tenants. {The revised} bill would take from [housing authorities] valuable tools by which to do so. This legislation is particularly untimely as many in our state are still trying to feel safe in their homes after the shocking Cheshire home invasion, which rocked everyone's feeling of security and turned all of our eyes toward stricter review of Connecticut offenders," Representative Greene told the committee.

The measure also "increases the likelihood of a law abiding citizen losing the opportunity to live in public housing to a Class A felon- a seemingly unfair prospect for lawful applicants vying for scarce and much needed [housing units]." Representative Greene testified.

The Seymour Housing Authority also “has expressed a concern about how this legislation will affect the 17,000 federal public housing units they oversee. [The U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] has its own criteria for screening, which was established under President Clinton’s “One Strike and You’re Out” Policy,” Representative Greene said, adding the proposed legislation may not comply with the federal policy.