



Honorable Mark K. Keller
Chairman
House Urban Affairs Committee
Room 226, ROB
P.O. Box 202217, MCB
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2217

Honorable Michael O'Brien
Minority Chairman
House Urban Affairs Committee
Room 226, ROB
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2217

November 10, 2017

Dear Representative Keller,

Thank you for collecting feedback from Pennsylvanians on how Act 153 of 2012 is enabling municipalities to use Land Banks to address vacant properties. As you know, Philadelphia became one of the first jurisdictions to create a land bank with the passage of Bill No. 130156 through City Council in December 2013. The Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations (PACDC) was a strong backer of the Philadelphia Land Bank (PLB) and is enthusiastic about the promise it now holds for reforming the way the City handles vacant properties.

The provisions in Act 153 that require Land Banks to be transparent to the public, as well as provide opportunities for community input, have been important to Philadelphia. The PLB Board of Directors contains community representation, including PACDC's Executive Director Rick Sauer. Community groups were provided the opportunity to provide extensive feedback on strategic plans developed by the PLB, and as a result, saw many improvements to the plans and the acquisition and disposition policies contained within them. PLB Board of Directors also set aside time for public comment at each meeting, so community members can speak directly to its leadership and management. An open, transparent, and accessible PLB is critical for building community trust and buy-in for its mission to get vacant properties back into productive re-use.

At a time when parts of Philadelphia are experiencing a development boom, while other parts of the city continue to be saddled with vacancy and blight, the PLB is an important vehicle to make strategic decisions about redevelopment. PLB's strategic plan sets specific goals for how it will use its acquisition and disposition powers to achieve balanced development, including affordable homes, market rate development, and green space. This ability of the PLB to be responsive to local needs and priorities for land use is what makes it a useful tool.

PACDC is concerned about the provisions in SB 667 that would enable eminent domain and land bank powers to coexist, and without requiring the same transparency and public accountability requirements that land banks are subject to under the PA Land Bank Act. More power and less public accountability is a dangerous combination. While the PLB is not likely to be affected by these changes if they were adopted, those provisions could weaken confidence of land banking as a system across Pennsylvania. We urge the General Assembly to reject SB 667 on those grounds.

Thank you for considering our feedback on Act 153.

Regards,

Beth McConnell, Policy Director bmcconnell@pacdc.org