

Dave Patton
City of Harrisburg Code Enforcement
Testimony on HB 1559 and SB 775

Good morning and salutations.

Blight is the one common denominator that is shared by many municipalities. There're many post mortem theories as to why a property becomes blighted. The one thing we do know is that once a blighted property takes hold of a neighborhood its cancerous affect becomes pervasive throughout the neighborhood and not only fosters a negative psychological affect but also affects property values not to mention an increase in police and fire responses.

As the Codes Administrator for the City of Harrisburg for 24 and ½ years and assisting municipalities across the Commonwealth, and many across the nation, I've seen the many faces of blight. The one thing that is most evident is good ownership make good neighbors. The current County tax sale system is flawed and does not foster good ownership but rather creates a system that allows more for property speculation or free grazing in our neighborhoods for profit.

We have witnessed many times that after purchase the properties are auctioned off on popular real estate websites to the highest bidder sometimes transferring 3 times in 1 month. We have property ownership in Australia, Europe, Mexico and many States across the nation. A system of purchase such as this leaves little to no enforcement ability for a municipality. There are quite literally hundreds of properties that transfer each year by virtue of the County tax sales. Anyone that has attended a County Judicial sale will witness that it's more of property flea market than anything else. From my vantage point the tax sales are the epicenter of our problems.

I fully support the enactment of Senate Bill 775 and House Bill 1559 to, at the very least, allow a municipality a level of screening of potential purchasers to narrow the playing field of the less than noble property purchases.

As it stands now a municipality must wait until ownership change at a Judicial sale then file a set aside petition to reverse the sale, wasting County Court time as

well as officials of a municipality. It's not a panacea solution to tackling blight but this, as well as a series of other Bills I am promoting as part of a Tax sale reform package will provide a municipality a chance to breathe and get its footing.

There's a lot of work that needs to be done in our city neighborhoods. Blight doesn't discriminate by geography. The notion that blight is simply an urban phenomenon is more popular invention. I strongly urge the continuation of what I see as renewed enthusiasm on tackling a subject that I have spent my career and most of my adult life battling. Thank you for your time and consideration.