

Statement on Council's Vote on RENTAL Act

Today, the Council has taken an important step toward addressing the District's housing crisis with the passage of the Rebalancing Expectations for Neighbors, Tenants, and Landlords (RENTAL) Act. This legislation is the product of significant consultation with many local stakeholders, including tenants, advocates, housing providers, and developers, who engaged in this process with seriousness and good faith.

The bill makes it easier for housing providers to remove tenants who violate their lease by failing to pay rent or engaging in serious criminal conduct. At the same time, it raises important questions about how we balance landlord needs with tenant protections, including special protections for victims of domestic violence. Evictions can have lasting and destabilizing impacts on families and communities, which is why these changes must always be viewed alongside our broader responsibility to preserve tenant rights and ensure long-term housing stability. In this debate, I worked to strengthen the ability of tenants to negotiate with prospective investors as part of the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA). TOPA is a District law that gives tenants the first chance to purchase their building when it is for sale, empowering residents to preserve affordability and improve building conditions.

I introduced two amendments to reinforce this balance. The first would have limited the proposed 15-year exemption to only those new building constructed after passage of the act. This would have encouraged continued housing investment without taking away the rights of existing tenants. Unfortunately, this amendment was not successful. The second sought to remove exemptions for buildings where the purchaser agrees to an affordability covenant, and I am proud that this principle was ultimately incorporated into a successful amendment that came ahead of mine from my colleague, Councilmember Nadeau, ensuring that affordability commitments cannot be used to short circuit TOPA protections. I view that as a meaningful win for tenants and long-term affordability.

The RENTAL Act is not perfect, but it is a step forward. It will help us encourage housing production, restore balance in landlord-tenant law, and continue the District's effort to build a more stable and equitable housing future. I remain committed to working with my colleagues, advocates, and residents to build on this progress and meet the District's pressing housing needs.