

Great Alternatives

*Statement*

Chairman, Greenleaf and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. I am

Christopher Moonis, Legislative Representative for the Pennsylvania State Association

*Christopher J. Moonis*

of Township Commissioners (PSATC) representing the first class townships of the

*Legislative Representative*

Commonwealth. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this very

*Pennsylvania State Association of Township Commissioners*

important piece of legislation, Senate Bill 543 (Printer's Number 1412).

*before*

As many of you are aware, PSATC's membership includes many urban townships that

also feel the impact of blight in their communities. In fact, most first class township

*the*

communities, in some measure of fighting the current

*Senate Judiciary Committee*

system when it comes to blight, "slum landlords." I believe it is

*Senator Stewart J. Greenleaf, Chairman*

important to note that the Township Commissioners' Executive Committee has

*Senate Bill 543*

unanimously supported the package of legislation (Senate Bills 538-543). We applaud

the sponsorship of Senator Piccola, Senator Brightbill and Representative Buxton and

look forward to assisting the Senate and House in any way to see that Senate Bill 543

is enacted into law, along with the other component parts of the "slum landlord"

package.

*December 16, 1997*

Most of the concerns our officials have expressed deal primarily with the current statutory provisions afforded to the "slum landlord." Pennsylvania's laws make it perfectly legal to purchase blighted and abandoned real estate only to have "slumlords" work the system in their favor avoiding compliance and continuing to utilize the cycle for as long as they want. These laws work in opposition to any economic development initiatives or revitalization efforts in a community because elsewhere in the township "slumlords" are free to continue the cycle of blight. The current statutory allowances work against most every municipality in the Commonwealth.

It is not uncommon, when reviewing the titleholders of currently blighted properties in our communities, to have the same titleholder show up over and over on different parcels of blighted property every few years. Typically properties are purchased at a county sheriff's sale for a fraction of the cost; liens, taxes and other debts are legally removed and properties are held for a few years while no taxes are paid and owners allow the property to work its way into the county repository, at which point the process starts over again.

This legislative package, as a whole, makes reasonable changes to current laws and code to give tenants the assurance that the property they live in is in compliance with widely accepted and standardized codes. It is ultimately the responsibility of the local government to protect the health and safety of its citizens. We are confident Senate Bill 543 will be a major relief to our local elected government officials, finally putting some teeth into statute to deal with urban blight and those landlords who have no concern for the citizens and the community as a whole.

We know many of our townships border cities and experience the direct affects of urban blight in their regions. In today's global economy, municipalities cannot survive within their traditional boundaries. We must look at urban blight as regional blight. In that vein, the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Commissioners fully supports passage of Senate Bill 543 and urge the committee to move the bill to the Senate floor.

We therefore, respectfully request the Senate, as a whole, to embrace Senate Bill 543 and that the General Assembly embrace the entire legislative package and see to it that this package becomes law. Not only is the overall economic condition of a region dependent upon eliminating urban blight, the health and safety of our citizens should demand it.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.