

City Council launches attack on state-enacted rent regulations

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Saying the time is ripe in Albany, City Council leaders launched an attack Wednesday on state-enacted rent regulations that have been a bane for tenants and a boon for landlords.

Led by Council Speaker Christine Quinn, a group of Council members joined more than 100 tenants and housing advocates on the steps of City Hall to announce the introduction of legislation calling on the state Legislature to repeal vacancy decontrol and to kill a state law that allows Albany to set rent regulations for the city.

"What we're saying very clearly here is we in the New York City Council stand for tenants," said Quinn.

A representative of a well-known landlord's group watching the proceedings from the sideline muttered, "It's like dogs chasing a fire truck. What are they going to do when they catch it?"

Efforts to strengthen rent regulation protections for tenants have been tried before in recent decades and gotten nowhere in Albany, largely because the Senate was under Republican control.

But now Democrats have a tenuous 32-to-30 edge.

"From all accounts, this is the year to make this move in Albany. Right now both houses of the state Legislature are more pro-tenant than ever before," Quinn said, to cheers from tenants.

Quinn, who began her career as a housing activist, blamed her Council predecessors for authorizing vacancy decontrol in 1993 - a move she says drove 300,000 affordable apartments out of rent-stabilization protection.

She said the current state laws encourage landlords to pressure tenants to leave "so they can jack up the rent."

The Democratic Assembly already has passed bills similar to the measures sought by Quinn, but there's much uncertainty on whether Senate Democrats can keep from breaking ranks.

"It's downright Colonial for New York City to not have a right to make its own decisions and for Albany to dictate to us," said Councilman Bill de Blasio (D-Brooklyn). "That has to end."

Councilman Alan Gerson (D-Manhattan) said the city needs to retain its diversity and prevent homes from being treated "strictly as market commodities."

He added, "They're places where people live, and they are built on land which no one created but is given to us."

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