

Action Alert!

Call Senate Democratic Leader John Sampson and tell him: Pedro Espada MUST NOT be made chair of the Senate Housing Committee in 2010

It seemed to many that 2009 would be the year that tenants would finally score a victory in Albany by repealing vacancy decontrol and passing other legislation to reform our rent laws. Our agenda was derailed in no small part due to the efforts of Pedro Espada, a state senator from the Bronx who is currently the subject of multiple legal and ethical investigations. Espada bullied himself into the position of chair of the Senate Housing Committee in 2009, where he blocked our rent reform bills from going to the full Senate where they could be brought up for a vote.

Then, in June, Espada led a coup in the Senate and defected to the Republican Party for a month before extracting concessions from Democrats in exchange for his return. Without question, Espada is one of the biggest foes of tenants in New York State. We have recently heard that Espada is fighting to keep his chairmanship of the Senate Housing Committee in 2010 - which would be a major blow to tenants.

John Sampson is the Senate Democratic Conference leader, and he has the power to block Espada and install a pro-tenant Senator as head of the housing committee instead. Please take 3 minutes out of your day to call Senator Sampson's office and say how you feel... but don't wait! Some of the committee posts have already been filled. Sampson needs to hear from you NOW.

A sample script: "Senator Sampson must NOT appoint Pedro Espada as chair of the Senate Housing Committee in 2010. Giving Espada this post again would be an outrage. We need a pro-tenant Senator in that post who will help us pass important rent reform bills THIS YEAR, including the repeal of vacancy decontrol."

Please call Senator John Sampson's office in Albany at: (518) 455-2788

After you've made the call, you can send Senator Sampson an email at: sampson@senate.state.ny.us

or lastly, make a second call - to his NYC district office: 718-649-7653

Below is a letter sent to Sampson from the Metropolitan Council on Housing:

Senator John L. Sampson
Senate Majority Conference Leader
New York State Senate
Albany, New York 12247

Dear Senator Sampson:

The Metropolitan Council on Housing is writing to express our outrage, and profound disappointment, upon hearing news that Pedro Espada might be re-appointed as chair of the Senate Housing Committee in 2010.

The landlord lobby could not have asked for a better minion than Espada in their campaign to thwart rent reform legislation. As the housing chair in 2009, Espada held every critical piece of rent reform legislation hostage, and then timed his coup to coincide with the final housing committee meeting, holding the rest of the Senate Democratic Party and its agenda hostage for a month thereafter.

Espada has anointed himself as the leading enemy of rent reform legislation, as was captured in a New York magazine profile of him in July 2009. Reading the list of bills on a special session called by the Governor, the magazine writes that "Espada exults, raising his [arms] toward the ceiling. "Look at this!" he shouts, "... "No vacancy decontrol! All Pedro!" Quantifying Espada's loyalties to the real estate lobby remains impossible, considering his duplicitous campaign filings, but his disdain for tenant protections is clear.

We trust that you understand the urgency of passing rent reform legislation in 2010. Not only is this crucial to stopping the hemorrhaging of our affordable housing stock amid an economic crisis, it is also essential to giving credibility to the Democratic Party in New York State. The members of Metropolitan Council on Housing, who come from across New York City, have been told for years by Democratic office holders and candidates that Democratic control of the Senate would be the key to getting important legislation passed that would fix our rent laws. In turn, many of our members have donated to, volunteered for, and canvassed for Democratic Senate candidates for years. If 2010 brings another year of disappointment for tenants, such efforts cannot be expected again. Difficult as it is to pass pro-tenant legislation with such a slim majority, if this does not happen in 2010, we believe that the chances of Democrats retaining control of the Senate will eclipse such efforts as the bigger long-shot.

The Metropolitan Council on Housing

Mario Mazzoni, organizer
Metropolitan Council on Housing