

Good afternoon. My name is Kelli Walker and I am Senior Vice President of the New Orleans Metro Association of REALTORS, as well as a renter at 3501 Annunciation Street. While our association applauds your efforts to ensure New Orleanians are living in housing that meets minimum health and safety standards, we do have some concerns and questions with this ordinance.

First, we are concerned with the number of exclusions provided in the ordinance. If the intent is truly to protect the health and safety of renters, then ALL rental properties should be subjected to these inspections. Please do not play favorites by giving a pass to units owned or managed by educational or medical institutions. We should not assume that they are abiding by the law any more than we should assume HRI Properties or any of the landlords present today are. We also ask that you not exclude short term rentals from inspections. The argument has been made that the STR ordinance provides for inspection of those properties, but it does not. It only provides for “attestations or documentation” that certain standards are being met. A rental is a rental regardless of the length of the lease, and we ask that all rentals abide by the same regulations. If the owner of a short term rental merely has to provide “certification that the property is in compliance with the City's Minimum Property Maintenance, Building, Electrical, Mechanical, and Plumbing Codes,” then why are these landlords not provided the same opportunity to certify that their properties are code compliant without subjecting them or their tenants to obtrusive inspections?

We have been told that the new law aims to give renters a voice or a level of protection from negligent landlords. Renters deserve and should have that voice, but would we not all be better served by enforcing the existing city code and bringing back the city-funded position of tenant advocate or housing ombudsman? Providing a new law to help enforce existing laws is unnecessary and it does not do nearly enough to provide a voice or a resource for tenants who need help. We believe the City would be better served by providing a dedicated position within City Hall to help serve as a mediator between landlords and tenants for the variety of disputes that may arise between those parties. The new law we need is one that protects renters from retaliation or retribution by their landlords.

We also have questions about what will happen to tenants in properties that fail inspections. Eventually these properties will be denied a certificate of occupancy. Where do the tenants go then? Also, how will the inspections work with tenants who wish to be present for inspections? Will they need to take a day off of work to wait for an inspector, just like we currently do for Cox Cable or Entergy? In a city full of hourly employees, they cannot afford a day without pay to for an inspector to tell them the home they live in is fit for occupancy. Personally, if an inspector is coming into the rental property where I reside, you can be sure I will be present.

Finally, if the purpose of this new law is to authorize a third-party inspection company from California to operate in New Orleans, then our association must firmly oppose this measure. There is no reason to bring in an outside entity from another state to do the job our own people

can do and should be doing. If Code Enforcement does not have the means, we will be happy to provide you with information from multiple other cities that have managed to enhance their Code Enforcement departments at little to no cost to the City. The point is, Councilmembers, there are other acceptable, reasonable solutions to this problem and we feel it is your duty to look into those before making a decision. To copy an ordinance from elsewhere just because it is any easy solution does a disservice to the residents of this town who deserve the right and appropriate solution to our problem. I hope all parties can work together to find the “New Orleans” solution to this problem.