

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AFFAIRS

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August 11, 2015
Start: 01:10 p.m.
Recess: 01:18 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E:
RAFAEL L. ESPINAL, JR.
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
JULISSA FERRERAS-COPELAND
KAREN KOSLOWITZ
RORY I. LANCMAN
VINCENT J. GENTILE

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON ESPINAL: Good afternoon. My name is Rafael Espinal. I am the chair of the Consumer Affairs Committee. I want to first acknowledge the members of the committee who have joined us. We have Karen Koslowitz from Queens. We have Rory Lancman from Queens. And we have Dan Garodnick from Manhattan. Today the committee will be voting on three pieces of legislation, proposed intros 287A, 586A, and 682A all of which have been previously heard by the committee. Proposed intros 287A sponsored by Council Members Maria del Carmen Arroyo, Peter Koo, and myself and 586A which I sponsored clarify requirements for signs, posters, and placards that advertise the price of gasoline and diesel fuel offered for sale at gas stations. Proposed intro 682A sponsored by Council Member Dan Garodnick and Jumaane Williams amends the housing maintenance code's definition of harassment in relation to buyer offers. First the gas station bills. Last session the council passed a local law that requires all gas stations to erect road signs and... and state the price per gallon for each grade of gasoline and indicate the cost for each form of

1 payment such as credit or cash. The requirements
2 have proven to be overly burdensome and unworkable
3 for smaller gas stations and for stations in areas
4 with zoning restrictions on such signs.
5 Additionally some stations previously purchase
6 signs that are not in compliance with the rule
7 promulgated by DCA in conjunction with the law that
8 weren't large enough to fit all of the new required
9 information or were so cluttered they were
10 difficult to read. Proposed Intro 287A requires
11 stations that chose... that choose to display any
12 signs, posters, or placards advertising the cost of
13 gasoline to at minimum display the lowest grade of
14 gasoline offered for sale and its price per gallon
15 including taxes. The bill also allows stations that
16 choose to erect road signs to advertise their
17 gasoline to post LED signs rather than black
18 lettering on a white background. Proposed intro
19 586A requires gas stations that offer a different
20 price for purchases made in cash or other specified
21 form of payment to state the price for each type
22 that would set the payment on any sign, poster, or
23 other display that advertises the price of gasoline
24 offered sale. For New Yorkers who rely on a car to
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2 get to work and manage their everyday lives the
3 cost of gasoline is... is a huge and often
4 fluctuating expense. These two bills would clarify
5 signage requirements to ensure greater consumer
6 information while also streamlining regulations for
7 industry and update the law to allow for LED signs.
8 It's a win win win. Now... harder problems... solve.
9 There has been a long history in New York City of
10 building owners offering rent regulated tenants
11 money to vacate their apartments. In recent years
12 some owners have engaged in abusive and
13 intimidating behavior to coerce tenants into
14 accepting buy out offers. Propose six... intro 682A
15 amends the housing maintenance code. But I'm going
16 to allow my colleague Dan Garodnick to further
17 explain the bill who's the main sponsor.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Alright Mr.
19 Chairman thank you very much for that. I want to
20 first thank you for your leadership on this as well
21 as Council Member Jumaane Williams and the Speaker
22 for their support on this important issue. You know
23 landlords have always felt a compulsion to try to
24 move rent stabilized tenants out of their units in
25 order to drive up rents. Not all of them have acted

1 on those instincts but it is clear that lower rent
2 units are less desirable for a landlord's bottom
3 line. And those most determined to get tenants out
4 have resorted to some of the most unscrupulous
5 behaviors around; breaking locks, turning off heat
6 or hot water, starving a building of repairs, or
7 even filing frivolous lawsuits. It has prompted
8 this council to take action in recent years. We
9 passed a bill giving the right to sue an owner for
10 harassment. We formed a coalition to fight back
11 against predatory equity. We even funded a group to
12 train tenants to coordinate their efforts citywide
13 to organize and to respond to abuse. One type of
14 abuse has taken a more unusual form. Some building
15 owners have taken a step of offering tenants in
16 lower rent apartments financial incentives to
17 convince them to leave their homes. While that
18 practice may sound innocent enough it frequently is
19 not. In recent years landlords have increasingly
20 retained the services of tenant relocation
21 specialists, agents of the landlord who make buyout
22 offers to tenants. Too often these tenant
23 relocation specialists intimidate, threaten, or
24 otherwise harass tenants using any means necessary
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2 to get them to accept buyout offers. We've heard
3 reports of their knocking on doors at all hours of
4 the night, following people to work, and they will
5 even contact family members in some situations in
6 order to convince you to take the buy-out offer and
7 to leave your home. We already have a word for
8 these kinds of tactics. This is called harassment
9 plain and simple. This bill intro 682 will help New
10 Yorkers by expanding the definition of harassment
11 to include the worst tactics used by tenant
12 relocation specialist as they try to induce tenants
13 to leave their regulated units; threatening,
14 intimidating, using obscene language, initiating
15 communication with such frequency at unusual hours
16 or at a place of work that can only possibly be
17 considered harassment, or knowingly falsifying
18 information that is being provided to a tenant.
19 These are all behaviors that will be prohibited in
20 this context. Rent stabilization plays a key role
21 in keeping housing affordable for all New Yorkers.
22 No one should ever be forced out of their apartment
23 and we must do more to expand the availability of
24 affordable housing while simultaneously protecting
25 the units that already exist. We can't let

1 predatory and irresponsible individuals buy up
2 properties only to let them fall into disrepair
3 while forcing out tenants to raise the rent. This
4 package of bills calls out this behavior by
5 landlords and tenant relocaters as the harassment
6 that it is. We can't allow it to... to continue and
7 we will not. So again I want to thank you Chair
8 Espinal. Together I think that the bills that we're
9 passing through this committee as well as the ones
10 through the housing and buildings committee
11 represent a very significant step toward creating
12 a... a fair environment for tenants and we look
13 forward to seeing them pass. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON ESPINAL: Thank you
16 Councilman Garodnick. There are fiscal impact
17 statements for each of the bills and there are no
18 fiscal impacts for the... for these bills. I'm
19 recommending a yes vote on three piece... three
20 pieces of legislation. I also understand that the
21 lead sponsor of Intro 287A Council Member Maria del
22 Carmen Arroyo is unable to be with us today. But
23 she has in... included a statement for the record. So
24 I'll ask the committee counsel to read that
25 statement into the record. Alright let's... let's not

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read it... let's not read it. We just... just need to submit it, yeah. Yeah we'll just add it to the record. Okay with that said I'll like to call the role.

COMMITTEE CLERK MARTIN: William Martin; Committee Clerk. Roll call vote; Committee on Consumer Affairs. Introductions are coupled. Chair Espinal.

CHAIRPERSON ESPINAL: I vote aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK MARTIN: Koslowitz.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: I vye [phonetic]... I vote aye on both.

COMMITTEE CLERK MARTIN: Lancman.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANCMAN: [off mic] Yes.

COMMITTEE CLERK MARTIN: By a vote of... by a vote of three in the affirmative, zero in the negative and no abstentions all items have been adopted.

CHAIRPERSON ESPINAL: Okay thank you. So we had three in the affirmative. And with that we will close the roll and adjourn this hearing.

[gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date August 11, 2015