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June 16, 2008

The Honorable John Pippy  
Pennsylvania Senate  
168 Main Capitol  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Senator Pippy:

I am writing to you today regarding SB 1291, prime sponsor Senator Rhoades, amending Title 53 providing for neighborhood blight reclamation and revitalization.

The PBA believes that the overall intent of this legislation is good; however, there are several provisions of the bill that concern us. First and foremost, we believe that there are current laws that, if enforced properly by Pennsylvania's municipalities, would eliminate many of the problems this bill seeks to address. Vigilant enforcement of municipal property maintenance codes should be the first focus. . More red-tape is not the answer to solving our Commonwealth's urban blight issues, and may, in fact, exacerbate them by driving some property owners out of our cities.

Our specific comments to SB 1291 include the following:

We believe that the definition of "residential building" needs to be amended so that it does not include apartment buildings and other residential structures that are considered commercial properties.

We do not support the provision that gives the state or a municipality the power to deny an applicant of a permit, certificate, license or approval for contemplated action if the applicant owns any property which is tax delinquent or has code violations. These individuals face fines and other penalties under existing law and this legislation, however, denying them the right to access a fishing license, for example, seems to be excessive and irrelevant. Denying them permits or approvals to continue their livelihood is counter productive as these individuals will not have the money to fix up their properties or pay their fine. We agree with the Pennsylvania Association of Realtors that Subchapter E should be removed from the legislation.

We also do not support the creation of a State Blight Data Collection System which would compile property maintenance code violations into a statewide central registry. We believe this would not be cost effective and would add a new cost of government on Pennsylvania's taxpayers, as well as an administrative burden to the municipalities. With 2,600 municipalities in the Commonwealth and hopefully vigorous local enforcement of property maintenance codes, staffing of such a registry would be expensive and we fail to see the benefit. We agree with PAR that Subchapter F should be removed from the legislation.

The PBA does support urban revitalization. Cities such as Philadelphia are one of the few bright spots in the current housing recession. But many potential homebuyers continue to seek homes in the suburbs that are situated on one or more acres. In addition to the desire for more space, many citizens continue to be concerned with the quality of public education and the level of crime. As people leave the cities, there has been a backlash of businesses relocating, abandoned structures and under funded school districts. This makes urban areas even less attractive places to live.

The PBA believes that state government must work to remove barriers to urban redevelopment, and that it must develop sound legislative solutions to the broad-based social and economic factors that hinder urban revitalization. These include excessive local and state ordinances that make it unprofitable and difficult to rebuild in the cities.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 979-8321.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Louis J. Biacchi".

Louis J. Biacchi  
Director of Governmental Affairs

cc: Members of the Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee