

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS HB 2311

Title: An act relating to creating the office of assisted housing ombudsman.

Brief Description: Creating the office of assisted housing ombudsman.

Sponsors: Haigh, Van Luven, Lovick, Veloria, Tokuda, Rockefeller, Dickerson, Skinner, Kagi, Fortunato, Miloscia, Keiser, Lantz, Eickmeyer, Wood, Gombosky, Anderson, O'Brien, Cody, Kenney, Santos, Edwards, Conway and D. Sommers.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF BILL

- Creates the office of assisted housing ombudsman in the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development to provide assistance on landlord-tenant relationships to tenants of public housing authority housing and to public housing authorities.

HOUSE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING & TRADE COMMITTEE

Staff: Steve Lundin (786-7127)

Background:

The state's Housing Authorities Law was enacted in 1939 creating an inactive public housing authority in every county, city, and town. An inactive housing authority is activated by the county, city, or town governing body adopting a resolution declaring a need for the housing authority. A number of housing authorities have been activated.

A housing authority is governed by an appointed five-member commission. Commissioners serve staggered, five-year terms of office. The governing body of a city with a population of 400,000 or more may by resolution expand its housing authority commission to seven members, who serve four-year staggered terms of office.

Housing authorities are authorized to lease or sell safe and sanitary housing to persons of low-income and may administer federal, state, or local housing programs. Housing authorities may make loans to a person of low-income to enable him or her to rehabilitate or purchase a dwelling unit, provide housing for low income farmers and

farm workers, and make loans to nonprofit organizations and for-profit businesses to finance buildings or developments with a requirement that a specified number of units must be occupied by persons of low-income for at least 20 years.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (DCTED) is directed to establish the Office of Assisted Housing Ombudsman to provide ombudsman services for tenants of housing owned or managed by housing authorities and for housing authorities.

The DCTED may provide these ombudsman services directly itself or may contract with nonprofit organizations to provide these services. Procedures must be established for the ombudsman to access tenant and housing authority files. The identify of a complainant, witness, or tenant remains confidential unless disclosure is authorized by tenant or the tenant's legal representatives. Disclosure of records outside of the office may be made without the consent of the tenant or complainant, if the name of the tenant or complainant has been redacted. The DCTED is authorized to adopt rules carrying out these provisions in accordance with federal and state regulations and rules governing landlord-tenant relations in housing authority housing.

Any person who is employed, retained or contracted by DCTED for an assisted housing ombudsman must have training in assisted housing programs, laws governing landlord-tenant relationships, and dispute or problem solving resolution techniques.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested January 16, 2000.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.