



Housing Alliance  
of Pennsylvania

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## **Housing Alliance announces publication of guide to help communities fight blight and take on absentee landlords**

(Minersville, February 23, 2011) – Standing before a dilapidated house in Minersville owned by an absentee landlord, Senator David Argall (R-29) joined members of the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania and local officials today to hand out the first available copies of *A Quick Guide: New tools for Addressing Blighted Properties*.

The new publication was written by members of the Housing Alliance to help municipalities and community members take advantage of Pennsylvania’s new anti-blight laws. The guide explains how the new tools can be used to reverse blight by, among other things, forcing negligent property owners to maintain their properties – even if they live out of state.

“It will take considerable time and effort to educate the public—including our local elected officials-- on how to utilize our new anti-blight law throughout our state,” said Senator Argall, who sponsored the “Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act in the legislature.

“There is no such thing as too much public information. This guide is an answer to the concerns of local governments, community groups and property owners. In addition, we are continuing to work together on other issues that need to be addressed in fighting blight and improving the job climate in our local communities.”

The passage of the Blight Bill can help cities and towns of all sizes prevent blight and address abandoned property issues through several new programs and rule changes. But HAP’s guide translates the bill into everyday language to help communities use the new law more effectively.

“The new law presents an unprecedented opportunity for communities to be more strategic in going after the most intransigent owners,” said Liz Hersh, executive director of the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania. “The blight bill gives the government officials explicit new powers to enforce the property maintenance code and go after serious, persistent, long standing, unabated housing code violations.”

The law enables several actions to be taken against negligent property owners. Among them:

**Extradition of out-of-state owners** makes it clear that if you own property in PA you have to maintain it or the city can come after you and bring criminal charges if needed.

**Private Asset Attachment** allows the city to take actions against owners of buildings, housing or land that is in violation of building or housing codes by placing a lien against the owner's assets, not just against the building in question. Private Asset Attachment enables local officials to go to court to attach the personal assets of the negligent owner.

**Permit Denial** allows the municipality to deny additional permits to a known offender until the owner has abated existing violations. This requires coordination of efforts and information, and creating a database among local entities. But the power is there. To enforce this law, municipalities would have to do pre-sale inspections and follow through within the given timeframe.

The new law also allows cities to establish Housing Courts specifically to deal with these issues. This could enable a Housing Court judge to get to know who the repeat offenders are and to bring them into compliance through progressive sanctioning up to and including jail time for long-standing, serious code violations that pose a threat to health and safety.

For a copy of the guide, log on to the Housing Alliance's library, [http://housingalliancepa.org/library/view.php?resource\\_id=204](http://housingalliancepa.org/library/view.php?resource_id=204).

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For more information on the Housing Alliance of PA - <http://housingalliancepa.org/>

Caption:

Liz Hersh, Executive Director of the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania joins Senator Dave Argall (with microphone) at an event releasing the first copies of A *Quick Guide: New tools for Addressing Blighted Properties*. Also participating in the event were, from left (behind Argall) Joe Bass, Infrastructure Manager, Borough of Minersville; Jeff Feeser, Schuylkill Community Action; and Gary Bender, Schuylkill County Demolition Program Coordinator.

