

Dean victim-protection bill stripped of core housing safeguards

Rep. Madeleine Dean *April 15, 2016 | 1:55 PM*

HARRISBURG, April 15 – A Pennsylvania bill that would allow abuse victims to terminate a rental contract based on concerns for their immediate safety was significantly weakened in the House Urban Affairs Committee on Wednesday, said Rep. Madeleine Dean, the bill’s sponsor.

House Bill 1051, as originally written, would allow a tenant who is a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking to change his or her locks or prematurely terminate a lease for safety reasons. Changes to the bill, offered by Rep. Chris Ross, R-Chester, would require court action, specifically a temporary protection-from-abuse order, be in place before such actions could transpire, costing the victim precious time and money, Dean said.

“Court action – which can spawn retaliatory violence and prolong unsafe conditions – does not keep pace with dangerous situations involving volatile intimate relationships and does nearly nothing to protect victims of stalking,” Dean said. “When more than 60 percent of domestic violence takes place in the home, the victim’s immediate need for safe housing is priority No. 1.”

An April 12 letter from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence urging Urban Affairs Committee members to stand against the changes reported that 113 victims of domestic violence were killed in 2015 in Pennsylvania.

“It cannot be overstated that safely relocating to a confidential location can mean the difference between survival and homicide for a victim of domestic violence and their children,” wrote PCADV Executive Director Peg J. Dierkers. “Research clearly shows a woman is most at-risk of being killed by her abusive partner when she ends the relationship.”

Ross’s amendment was adopted by a [vote of 14-12](#), with Rep. Tom Murt, R-Montgomery, and Rep. Jamie Santora, R-Delaware, joining Democrats in the negative.

“The changes were made in haste and sever the bill’s stated purpose to protect victims effectively and immediately,” Dean said. “Additionally, much of the language added to the bill significantly clouds finer points regarding relationships within the home, such as those dealing with children and immediate family members. The amendment also strips a landlord’s ability to terminate a lease with the abuse perpetrator.

“While House Bill 1051 needs technical work on some of its language, the complete impairment of the bill’s intent to protect first is a non-starter and actually would force me to vote against my own bill. Pennsylvanians deserve better than this process, and the victims of violence can afford nothing less.”

Last legislative session, the original version of this legislation unanimously passed the House, but was not voted on in the Senate.

Wednesday's committee vote was the first action taken on H.B. 1051 since it was introduced this legislative cycle, in April 2015. The bill was tabled in committee until May 17, further delaying a critical, potentially life-saving piece of legislation, Dean said.

"I am concerned with this delay, especially considering its previous unanimous passage in the House, and the fact that every nine seconds, a woman falls victim to domestic violence in the U.S.," Dean said.

PA House Urban Affairs Contact List and Vote:	Amendment Vote:
Majority	
Chairman Scott Petri spetri@pahousegop.com	YES
Lewis, Harry, Jr., hlewis@pahousegop.com	YES
Corbin, Becky, bcorbin@pahousegop.com	YES
Culver, Lynda Schlegel, lculver@pahousegop.com	YES
Cox, Jim jcox@pahousegop.com	YES
Helm, Susan C. shelm@pahousegop.com	YES
Kauffman, Rob W. rkauffma@pahousegop.com	YES
Knowles, Jerry jknowles@pahousegop.com	YES
McGinnis, John D jmcginnis@pahousegop.com	YES
Murt, Thomas P. tmurt@pahousegop.com	NO
Ross, Chris cross@pahousegop.com	YES
Rothman, Greg grothman@pahousegop.com	YES
Santora, James R. jsantora@pahousegop.com	NO
Simmons, Justin J. jsimmons@pahousegop.com	YES
Wheeland, Jeff C. jwheeland@pahousegop.com	YES
White, Martina A. mwhite@pahousegop.com	YES
Minority	
Chairman Thomas Caltagirone TCaltagi@pahouse.net	NO
Dawkins, Jason, JDawkins@pahouse.net	NO
Deasy, Daniel J. DDeasy@pahouse.net	NO
Kim, Patty PKim@pahouse.net	NO
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Brown, Vanessa Lowery VBrown@pahouse.net	NO
Cook-Artis, Tonyelle TArtis@pahouse.net	NO
Farina, Frank FFarina@pahouse.net	NO
Gainey, Ed EGainey@pahouse.net	NO
Neilson, Ed ENeilson@pahouse.net	NO
Schweyer, Peter PSchweyer@pahouse.net	NO