



Testimony on City Council Resolution #240047
Hearing Regarding Act 135 – Abandoned & Blighted Property Conservatorship Act
Andrew Toy for PACDC
March 21, 2024

Good afternoon Chairman Squilla, Vice Chair Jones and City Council Commerce and Economic Development Committee members. My name is Andy Toy and I am the Policy Director for the Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations (PACDC). Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee regarding Resolution #240047 concerning the Abandoned & Blighted Property Conservatorship Act of Pennsylvania, also known as Act 135.

Our view is that Act 135 is an important tool that can be utilized when other remedies do not work to improve, stabilize, and eliminate blighted properties that negatively impact adjoining properties and surrounding neighborhoods. Neighbors who are forced to endure the reality of a neglected property may face challenges to their own property and their own health. Simply put: absentee property owners should not be allowed to abuse their neighbors through neglect. Act 135 offers a tool to hold them accountable.

That being said, we are aware of recent stories in the press. There seem to be a few entities that are utilizing this law in a way to make a profit without regard to other community concerns. None of our members who have utilized Act 135 to address blight and put properties back into productive use are involved in these cases. However, we are concerned that the intention of the Act (to improve communities) may sometimes be lost, which must be addressed. Our shared journey towards equity demands that we stand together against those who may take advantage of programs and end up extracting wealth from our communities.

In our opinion and experience, the best approach is to address properties before they become blighted so residents can remain in their homes and also avoid impacts on surrounding properties and neighborhoods. If there are homeowners or renters living in a property that needs a new roof or plumbing repairs, we want property owners to be able to access our Basic Systems Repair Program or low-cost loans. PACDC has championed the work of our Housing Counselors in Philly who are able to connect property owners to programs that address problems before they become blighted and uninhabitable. And we also know that Tangled Titles are an issue that prevents people from borrowing against their equity to do repairs or to invest without surety whether it's their property to invest in.

We also believe that there are other tools in the toolbox that should be considered before the almost last resort of Conservatorship. In addition, better enforcement of existing laws, such as the City's Windows and Doors ordinance would help to stem blight in the first place. And the City does need to get its Sheriff Sale process back on track to turn around vacant properties more quickly and bring targeted properties into the Land Bank for eventual disposition that would prioritize the needs of the community and the need for greater affordability, both homeownership and rental, across the board.

While we support the appropriate use of Act 135 as another tool to fight blight, we want to ensure there are remedies available before resorting to the intervention of Act 135. While City Council cannot change state law, it can invest significant resources to address the underlying difficulties many low-income homeowners face.

Thank you - Andy Toy
atoy@pacdc.org