



Rental Safety Proposal

Proposed Motion: Approve the Rental Safety Resolution and the inclusion of the Rental Safety Proposal in the Local Legislative Agenda.

Sponsor: Kaylee Galloway, ASVP for Governmental Affairs

Persons of Contact: Legislative Affairs Council

Date: December 11, 2013

Attachments: Rental Safety proposal

Background & Context

AS Local Legislative Agenda will be separated into two sections:

1. Priorities
 - AS Local Liaison will predominately focus on these issues throughout the year
2. Interests
 - Evolving section of the agenda that can be added to
 - Allows for developing issues including those that may not directly affect students but that the AS Local Liaison needs to be educated on and ready to talk to community members and elected officials about

The Legislative Affairs Council has been drafting proposals for the agenda. The proposals will serve multiple purposes including being a resource for the respective liaisons, building content for a campaign if students want to run one, and having information relevant to draft a fact sheet for students when they lobby or if they are interested in the topic. The proposal itself is very detailed and not meant to be perfect word for word. This means, that when we are passing a legislative issue, we are passing the idea and the concepts expressed in the proposals, not necessarily every word of every proposal. Since this is the case, I think it is appropriate to allow for the proposals to evolve, grow, and develop over time and as we learn more about the topics. Furthermore, the proposals consider the issues from a short, intermediate, and long term perspective, so that students can benefit from these proposals this year and in years to come. The goal is to build a strong foundation so that action taken towards these issues are well developed and strategic.

The AS Legislative Agendas will be multiple pages and will include the proposals. However, the section of the agenda that we give legislators, staff and other elected officials must be short and must reflect our priorities in a concise and effective manner.

Summary of Proposal

Rental safety is a long-standing issue that has affected many generations of Western Students. This quarter a work group has been meeting to discuss potential actions that can be taken to make progress with rental safety. We would like to pass the resolution in order to be poised for action right at the beginning of Winter quarter 2014.

The attached documents have been passed by the Legislative Affairs Council. The Rental Safety Proposal is only one of a couple topics that will be included in the local agenda (priority and interests) and has been discussed at one board work session.

Rental Safety Proposal

- **Washington State Law Title 59 RCW** establishes the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords in Bellingham.
- Some landlords in Bellingham violate their duties and endanger their tenants.
- Bellingham need new city ordinances passed to ensure that the law is enforced.
- Renters are harmed:
 - **Physically** – Tenants live in homes that are violating of health and safety laws. Negligent landlord oversight of properties results in serious injury and suffering by tenants.
 - **Financially** – Violations of Washington State Tenant Laws regarding rent and security deposits inappropriately places undue expenses on tenants.
 - **Psychologically** – Living in dangerous housing and dealing with negligent landlords causes undue stress that negatively impacts tenants emotional well-being.
- Currently, many students do not know their rights, how to identify housing or safety violations, or who to contact for support.
- The current complaint-based system inappropriately places pressure on the tenants to protect their rights and shifts the responsibility away from the landlords.
- Students are eager to further develop, implement, and enforce relevant Bellingham Municipal Codes that will benefit the entire community.
- Our suggestions include:
 - **Registration:** Require landlords to register all their properties with the Bellingham City Permit Center. Registrations to be kept on record and available to public.
 - **Enforce Inspection:** Require rental properties to be inspected by a professional to check for health or safety hazards. Also respond to tenant requests. While the code currently allows for inspection, it is not enforced.
 - **Education:** Establish new educational resources for landlords and tenants to understand responsibilities and protections in the law.
 - **Communication:** Support greater communication between landlords, tenants, students, WWU, neighborhood associations, non-profits, and the city of Bellingham.
- The outcomes:
 - Better health and safety of renters in the community.
 - Improved relations between tenants and landlords.
 - Improve neighborhood safety and community in Bellingham.