



Missouri House of Representatives

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Missouri Property Rights Legislation, Including 'Squatters Bill,' Heads to Governor's Desk for Approval

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Legislation passed by the Missouri General Assembly as part of a comprehensive property rights bill will provide much needed relief to property owners seeking solutions to dealing with unlawful occupants.

HB 2062 prohibits counties, municipalities, or political subdivisions from implementing eviction moratoriums unless explicitly permitted by state law. The bill was expanded by the state legislature to encompass provisions related to electric vehicle charging stations, shutdown orders, land banks, and property rights, and now includes language from State Representative Phil Amato's HB 2896, also known as the Squatters Bill.

This legislative proposal, modeled after the successful Florida "anti-squatter" law, proposes amendments to Missouri's trespassing laws to enhance protection of property rights and streamline procedures for dealing with unauthorized occupants. The bill broadens the definition of trespass in the first degree to cover unauthorized entry and refusal to vacate vacant properties or structures. Trespassers under these circumstances would face Class A misdemeanor penalties, empowering law enforcement to address unlawful occupation effectively.

The legislation establishes a mechanism for the swift removal of unlawful occupants from residential properties, ensuring due process through a legal procedure that mirrors existing protocols for restraining orders. This process allows for the immediate removal of trespassers via ex parte court orders, followed by a full protection order hearing.

Furthermore, the language contained within HB 2062 aims to differentiate between squatters and lawful tenants, safeguarding the rights of the latter under Missouri's "unlawful detainer" statutes. Property owners must affirm that they have not leased the property to an unlawful occupant, with false affidavits subject to criminal penalties and civil liability.

The bill also clarifies definitions of "vacant real property" and "vacant structure" to ensure clarity and consistency in enforcement. Additionally, the legislation improves on the similar Florida legislation as it provides protections for law enforcement officers acting in good faith while enforcing trespassing laws.

"This legislation is critical for defending the property rights of Missourians. By passing this bill, we are ensuring that property owners have the necessary tools to protect their investments and maintain the integrity of their properties," Amato, R-Arnold, said. "It's about safeguarding our communities and upholding the fundamental rights of law-abiding citizens. Our state will not stand by as people trespass and tread on the rights of our people. Instead, today we are saying that squatting will not be tolerated in Missouri."

With its passage in the Missouri General Assembly, HB 2062 now heads to the desk of Governor Mike Parson for signing into law.

Representative Phil Amato, a Republican, represents part of Jefferson County (District 113) in the Missouri House of Representatives. He was elected to his first two-year term in November 2022. For more information, please contact Rep. Amato at 573-751-2504 or by email at Phil.Amato@House.Mo.Gov.

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