

Special Report Columbus Passes Short-term Rental Ordinance, Demonstrates Need for Ongoing Work

The City of Columbus passed legislation aimed at providing oversight of the growing online short-term rental market, including properties listed on Airbnb and other platforms. The legislation contains some positive elements sought by the hotel and lodging industry throughout the discussion, but some issues and problems remain unresolved. The Columbus process contained unfortunate steps, including changes to the city's Hotel/Motel Operations and licensing laws which were unrelated to short-term rentals, and which had been put in place in November of 2015 with the support of the hotel industry and other local organizations including the Columbus Chamber, Experience Columbus, and neighborhood groups.

Important positive steps contained in Columbus' short-term rental legislation include:

- A registration and permitting process for short-term rentals, including an annual fee
- Data must be reported to city by platforms, including rates
- Illegal for platforms to list properties without valid registration number posted
- Liability insurance requirement
- Hosts to keep guest data on file
- Emergency contact required to be listed and available
- Guest safety requirements
- Steps to curb nuisance activity
- Addresses trafficking, drugs, and other illegal activity
- Includes civil rights protections
- Requires notification of electronic monitoring or "interception devices"
- Indicates city will collect taxes

The Columbus measure is in some ways incomplete, in that it does not contain complete language regarding the process for the collection and remission of relevant taxes, may miss important elements concerning the impact of short-term rentals on the affordability and availability of housing, does not specify a complaint-driven inspection process promised during deliberations, and includes a provision which could exempt the online platforms from enforcement of significant parts of the safeguards.

The passage of the legislation does not signal the end of the discussion regarding short-term rentals in Ohio's capital city. The sponsor of the legislation indicated in public meetings and council session that the measure was a first step, and that the city will undertake a study of larger impacts of this type of commercial activity. OHLA and its Greater Columbus Lodging Council continue to work on the next steps regarding short-term rental oversight in Columbus, including discussions on implementation, potential rule-making processes, and additional details and provisions that are necessary to accomplish our consistently stated goals:

- guest/visitor health and safety
- level playing field in oversight regulation and taxation
- ensuring no negative impact on neighbors and neighborhoods

Discussions on short-term online rental oversight continue in other major cities and other communities around Ohio. OHLA has research data, best practices, draft legislative language, and examples from cities around the country that have been tried and tested. If you hear of discussions of short-term rental within your community, or if you have questions about any aspect of this activity, contact Joe Savarise at joe@ohla.org.