

West Powelton/Saunders Park RCO
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April 8, 2014

The Honorable Stewart Greenleaf
Chairman, Pennsylvania Senate Judiciary Committee
711 North York Road
Willow Grove, Pa. 19090

Dear Senator Greenleaf:

We are writing to express our support for the passage of Senate Bill 1095, an anti Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (anti SLAPP) law co-sponsored by State Senator Larry Farnese.

This bill goes a long way towards protecting volunteer civic groups such as ours from claims filed solely to quiet the voice of our citizens. SB 1095 establishes reasonable monetary consequences for the plaintiff, in the event their action is determined to be frivolous or malicious and intending to deter advocacy in the public interest while still leaving intact the right to file suit.

One long-established civic association in Philadelphia has already been forced to close as a result of SLAPP lawsuits. Many civic associations, such as ours, have been established because of a new Philadelphia Zoning Code that requires applicants for zoning variances to meet with Registered Community Organizations. Unfortunately, incorporated bodies are required to have a lawyer to participate at the Zoning Board hearing. This is an expense that some communities cannot afford. As a result, many of the RCOs are all-volunteer, unincorporated groups. This leaves the individual residents exposed to any SLAPP lawsuits. For this reason, passage of SB 1095 is especially important in Philadelphia.

SB 1095 will cause reasonable pause in those who have previously used the legal system to discourage community participation and advocacy in the open, public process of land use and licensing matters that directly impact the quality of life for Pennsylvania residents.

We would appreciate it greatly if you would place this letter in the record created by this Senate Judiciary hearing.

Sincerely,

Lucia E. Esther
Chair

CC: The Honorable Larry Farnese
First Senatorial District
1802 South Broad Street
Philadelphia, Pa. 19145