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## HRC pushes for stronger housing laws

By Sam Morgen, New Era staff writer Apr 6, 2018

The Hopkinsville Human Relations Commission will soon make a push for new city ordinances it says will restore the balance of power between tenants and landlords.

“The playing field has always been tilted heavily toward the landlord,” said HRC Director Bernard Standard.

Through eviction, poor housing conditions and an informal housing market that sometimes operates without leases, tenants have little collateral, the HRC believes.

“If the tenant files a complaint, they have to put their name down, and then they have to let their landlord know that they filed a complaint. And then they end up getting evicted,” Standard said.

In the last fiscal year, 678 evictions occurred in Christian County. This fiscal year, which ends in June, more than 800 evictions have occurred.

“The issue really comes down to habitable housing for the citizens of Hopkinsville,” Standard said.

On April 19, the HRC will make a presentation to the Hopkinsville City Council during a Committee of the Whole meeting, advocating for four ordinances.

The ordinances would change code enforcement officers from employees of Community Development Services to city employees, implement the Uniform Residential Landlord and Tenant Act known as URLTA, allow code enforcement officers to inspect properties each time the property is the subject of a business transaction and require landlords to acquire a free license, and fine landlords for repeated criminal activity that happens on their properties.

“They all stand together as one,” Standard said of the proposed ordinances. “Any one of them missing kind of dilutes it. It’s like a table. You’ve got to have all four legs on it or else it’s not going to function like you want it to.”

The ordinances have been modeled after the ordinances from the city of Covington. Clarksville has implemented URLTA, which would allow, among other things, tenants to repair broken items within their property and deduct the cost of the repairs from rent.

In many cases, tenants will withhold rent when landlords fail to make repairs. Landlords then can sue for eviction and win because tenants who have not paid rent are automatically subject to being evicted.

City Attorney Doug Willen is reviewing the ordinances in preparation of the Committee of the Whole meeting.

Standard believes enough city council members will vote to forward the ordinances to the city council meeting.

One councilmember already on board is Patricia Bell.

“I know a lot of people don’t want to hear it, but it just needs to be done,” Bell said. “I know I’m going to be heavily criticized, but it’s the right thing to do.”

She said she believes that up to 90 percent of landlords will be in favor of the new ordinances, but the 10 percent who will be forced to “bring their property up to par” will be vocal opponents of it.

“I think (the ordinances) will take care of both the landlord and the tenants,” Bell said. “It will help the city grow both in beautification and economically.”

*Reach Sam Morgen at 270-887-3241 or [smorgen@kentuckynewera.com](mailto:smorgen@kentuckynewera.com).*