

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you.

I am here to voice opposition to discrimination against college students. As a matter of full disclosure, I am a landlord in Edinboro, a former resident of Edinboro, and a former Edinboro student. I will say that some landlords have expressed approval with the anti-student ordinances as they are an effective barrier to entry for new competition. (Judge that as you will.)

Students are being discriminated against with these ordinances, but I would also like to mention two other issues.

Insurance companies are refusing to write policies for units that are rented to students, those that do can and do charge more money.

The state universities themselves are abusing their authority over students, forcing them to live in both “university owned” and “privatized” housing as a condition of enrollment. This amounts to price fixing and market manipulation and denies the students the right to choose where they live. The students’ costs are increased dramatically by these policies, dorm students pay approximately twice what my tenants pay not including their required meal plans.

That said, we are here to address the anti-student ordinances that Edinboro and other college towns have enacted.

To make a point, I will read a few excerpts from Edinboro’s ordinance number 563, replacing the word “Student” with, well, you’ll see. What you will hear is offensive and I apologize in advance for that, but I am doing this to make a point.

From the “legislative intent” section:

The proliferation of BLACK rentals in traditional family dwellings puts a substantial burden on our Police, Zoning and Code Enforcement staff and on the all volunteer Fire Department. The proliferation also leads to lower municipal revenue.

This legislation will help ensure that the Borough can afford to provide the essential services and also keep neighborhoods to a manageable mix to reduce frustration and the chances for conflicts that happen between BLACK renters and their retired and/or family oriented neighbors.

One more, from Section 2:

No Single-Family Home, Townhouse, Duplex, or Conversion Unit, used as a JEWISH House shall be located on a lot, any portion of which is closer to another lot containing a JEWISH House than a distance determined by multiplying twenty (20) times the minimum lot width required for a single-family dwelling in the district in which the JEWISH House is located.

Now if what you just heard was offensive to you, my point has been made. Were you reminded of the segregated South? Apartheid South Africa? Hitler’s Germany? These excerpts were from Edinboro’s ordinance, substituting the ethnic terms for “student”.

Why should this kind of discrimination be allowed against ANY non-criminal members of our society. Keep in mind that many of these students have served our nation in Iraq and Afghanistan. Is this kind of discrimination what they fought for?

As you listen to the testimony of those who support these ordinances, please in your mind consider what that testimony would sound like if the word “student” was replaced with words like “Black”, “Jewish”, “Catholic”, “Irish”, “Italian”, “immigrant”, or any other group that has suffered discrimination.

As for the claims of economic non-contribution by students, this is a fallacy. Sure, few pay income tax, but property taxes are paid through rents. Borough services are paid for. Student houses are a great boon to the school district as rental properties pay school property tax, but send few or no kids to the school district. Further, students pay tuition and rent, and they support local businesses, fueling the local economy. Without the university, Edinboro would be a sleepy crossroads with one blinking light. It seems that some people only see the negative aspects of having a state university in town. That is unfortunate.

To give you a feeling of how this ordinance has been applied I will present you with an outline of an actual case.

Wendy Carter and Ray Smaltz own a property in Edinboro which they rented to a young working couple who were engaged, but not married, they were not students when they signed their lease. There were no issues with the property or the couple, until they decided that going to school would be in their best interests. A nosy neighbor tipped off the borough and they pounced on the landlords, ordering them to evict their, now student, tenants.

The case was appealed to Edinboro’s zoning and hearing board, the ruling was that had the couple been married, their marital status would trump their student status, but since they were merely engaged, they were students in violation of the ordinance and had to be evicted. He was a veteran, I’m sure he appreciated that he fought for our country, but was forced to be evicted when he enrolled in classes. Only in America...

I hope you can see the outrage in this case and the fanatical attitude of the borough in enforcing this ordinance. This happened in Edinboro, not Nazi Germany. I hope that you can see the need to protect students from this kind of discrimination.

There is also a sneaky provision that allows the borough to retract a student housing permit if a unit is not rented to students for one year. The effect of this is to ratchet down the number of student apartments over time. We are required to submit the names of our tenants to the borough, they have the ability to cross check these names against the university’s published student directory. (I don’t know if they are actually doing this, but they certainly are able to.)

Because of this provision, landlords with student permits are forced to discriminate against families and any non-students. Personally, I have turned down quite a few non-students including several incoming professors with one year contracts with the university. Those folks would have been good additions to

the neighborhood but renting to them would have cost me my student rental permit. Unintended consequences of a poorly thought out law.

The university has always required freshmen to live on campus, but now is requiring sophomores to also live on campus to fill up the new privatized apartments. (Hopefully the subject of another hearing soon!) This has resulted in many vacant apartments. (2-300?) The owners of those units stand to lose their ability to return to student rentals once the college's actions are challenged in court and the sophomores are again allowed to live off campus. Predictably, the better apartments got rented, and the less desirable ones are vacant. Will they be rented or left to fall into disrepair? Time will tell, but many are of "student quality". perfectly livable, but not that desirable for a family.

I would ask that you find a way to add "Student" to the list of protected classes in all state legislation. This discrimination must be stopped.

Thank you.

Vince Dunsworth

vince.dunsworth@gmail.com