



Assemblyman Kenneth P. Zebrowski

Code Enforcement Update 2016

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Addressing Code Enforcement and Fire Safety in Rockland County



As you may know, for several years now I've been fighting to restore proper code enforcement in certain municipalities in Rockland County. Unfortunately, we've seen a systemic failure of fire and building code in both the Village of Spring Valley and Town of Ramapo. Illegal schools and converted residential homes are operated dangerously, often times with serious violations. Most concerning are the students and residents housed inside these buildings; their lives, and the first responders that answer in the event of an emergency, continue to be put at risk each and every day.

For nearly three years I have been in constant contact with both the Department of State and State Education Department and have developed legislation to address this issue through different avenues. Combined, I have sent a total of 12 letters to both departments requesting intervention through a full State investigation and by requiring that all schools get properly inspected. Although we have made progress from where we were, we still have a long way to go. My goal is to ensure that every building in Rockland County is a safe place to live and learn.

This mailer provides an overview of the history of this issue, the actions I've taken to bring awareness and find solutions, and where we find ourselves two years later. With your help and support, we will work toward installing proper code enforcement in these municipalities so that every building in Rockland is safe for the residents and students inside, and the first responders that risk their lives upon entering.

Sincerely,

Ken Zebrowski

How We Got Here

After noticing a pattern of severe fires breaking out in illegally converted buildings throughout Rockland, Assemblyman Zebrowski first contacted the Department of State in 2013. Concerned with an impending tragedy, he noted the frequency of the fires with little being done to enforce proper fire and building code. He called for immediate State intervention and requested they open a full 381 investigation.

Ken provided the State with specific details of the rampant code violations brought to his attention by concerned local fire officials:

- Construction of schools or boarding houses without proper building permits
- Converted single family homes with residents and students well above maximum occupancy

- Schools with no certificates of occupancy with egregious violations such as: students learning in tents and trailers
- Temporary certificates of occupancy that have been abused and re-issued for years
- Complete lack of action from the local building departments and code enforcement officials to enforce safe fire and zoning code

Over the next two years, Assemblyman Zebrowski sent six letters and had numerous phone conferences with the Department of State highlighting growing examples of a systemic failure of code enforcement and reiterating the severity of the situation. He noted the continued lawlessness that had been occurring in the two municipalities and repeatedly stressed the risk that it posed residents.

What's Been Accomplished

- Department of State issues corrective order to Spring Valley on failure to enforce proper building and fire code (October 6, 2015).
- Department of State issues corrective order to Town of Ramapo on failure to enforce proper building and fire code (April 18, 2016).
- State Education Department issues order to Rockland County Fire Coordinator to inspect private schools that have refused to follow the law (May 20, 2016).
- Exposed fraudulent inspection reports filed by a Ramapo Fire Inspector (March 14, 2016).



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Code Enforcement

Summer 2016

What We Plan to Do:

- Push for re-inspections of recently inspected schools where serious questions remain.
 - Continue to push for a full takeover of the Building Departments of the Town of Ramapo and Village of Spring Valley with immediate moratoriums on all variances and temporary certificates of occupancy.
 - Pass a bill to over-haul and modernize the process of fire inspections of private schools.
- Push for passage of the following bills:**
- **A.2847:** Prevents taxpayer funding of private schools that do not follow the law and conduct inspections.
 - **A.5856:** Imposes penalties on building owners who alter structures in a way that impedes the safety of a firefighter.
 - **A.10235A:** Empowers the Secretary of State to revoke a code enforcement officer's certification for misconduct with inspections.