

# Governor Carney Signs Anti-Blight Legislation

*Bills will give local governments new tools to address vacant homes, strengthen neighborhoods*

**NEW CASTLE, Del.** – Governor John Carney on Thursday signed into law House Bills 187 and 188, bipartisan legislation that give new tools to local governments to fight neighborhood blight and combat vacant or abandoned homes.



*Governor Carney signs House Bills 187 and 188.*

Representatives J.J. Johnson, Stephanie T. Bolden, Joseph Miro, Daniel Short, John Mitchell and Kim Williams, and Senators Bryan Townsend, Margaret Rose Henry and Stephanie Hansen sponsored the two bills, which passed the General Assembly unanimously in June.

Governor Carney signed the legislation at a vacant home purchased by New Castle County with state funds as part of an anti-blight initiative in the Garfield Park community near New Castle.

House Bill 187 will allow local governments to prequalify bidders at sheriff's sales to restrict bidders who are delinquent on property taxes or violating property maintenance codes. House Bill 188 will allow local governments to place a lien on a vacant property in violation of maintenance standards to recoup enforcement and abatement costs.

"Vacant and abandoned properties can bring down property values, attract crime and make neighborhoods unattractive places to live, work and play," said **Governor Carney**. "Strengthening our communities requires creative solutions to

the problems we face, and new tools such as these will help local leaders effectively combat blight by directly addressing vacant homes. Delaware has invested \$8.25 million in Strong Neighborhoods funding to redevelop housing in communities such as Garfield Park, which is leading to \$35 million in other investment, and we must continue to work supporting residents who want to create safe streets and livable communities.”

Vacant and abandoned homes become breeding grounds for crime and dumping grounds for trash, are targets for arson and become a health and safety hazard for their surrounding communities. These properties also drive costs to county taxpayers, diverting public safety resources, and force local government to pay for basic maintenance, grass mowing, and waste removal. Additionally, vacant and abandoned housing has been shown to depress neighborhood property values and reduce tax revenues that fund critical public services.

“We want our neighbors to have pride in their communities, but housing vacancies overwhelm too many regions of our state and cause a host of problems in its tracks. House Bills 187 and 188 provide a beacon of light in those situations. With these bills, local governments are empowered to take charge of blight in these communities by ultimately working to return vacant properties to use and helping Delawareans restore that pride,” said **Representative James Johnson, D-New Castle**, prime sponsor of the bills. “Our residents – and their homes – deserve that attention. By eliminating blight we will be able to foster a new sense of community and responsibility.”

“This legislation is all about holding real estate investors accountable and promoting vibrancy in our communities,” said **Senator Bryan Townsend, D-Newark**. “Neglected properties and blight are having a real impact on crime rates, property values, and quality of life for Delawareans. Investors and people who want to be able take ownership of homes must also take ownership of maintaining them, not just rely on the community and taxpayers to foot the bill for blight. Coupled

with investments in open-space for established neighborhoods, the tools in this legislation can be of great help to promoting the safety and prosperity we should want all Delawareans to enjoy.”

“By turning vacant places across our county and state into livable spaces we will reduce crime, lift property values, and turn liabilities into opportunities for hardworking new homeowners,” said **New Castle County Executive Matthew Meyer**. “City, county and state collaborated to create stronger policies, and we thank Governor Carney and the leadership of the General Assembly who saw the value in the legislation being enacted today.”

“As a former president of New Castle County Council, I know all too well the cost of blight for local governments,” said **Senator Stephanie Hansen, D-Middletown**. “The downward spiral that blight creates for entire communities is stunning. It’s not just the risk of crime or fire—studies show that vacant and abandoned homes can affect surrounding residents’ physical and mental health. These bills offer invaluable tools that protect our communities from speculators who try to game the system at our expense, and leave taxpayers and responsible property owners holding the bill. I’m glad to have supported it, and hope to continue working with state and local officials to protect and revitalize our neighborhoods.”

“These new tools build upon the work of the Strong Neighborhoods Housing Fund in purchasing, renovating and selling formerly vacant, abandoned or blighted properties, turning 181 empty homes or vacant lots into owner-occupied homes that brighten a street,” said **Anas Ben Addi, Director of the Delaware State Housing Authority**. “These partnerships with local governments and nonprofit partners help improve the quality of life for our residents and make Delaware a better place to live.”

“I have seen the negative effects that vacant, abandoned and

blighted properties have on vibrant neighborhoods such as ours," said **Lee Jarmon, president of the Overview Gardens Garfield Park Civic Association**. "I commend the state, county and other local leaders for working together to pass legislation to address and help to remedy this serious issue."

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