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### PATERSON PUSHES TENANT-FRIENDLY RENT MEASURES

By Dawn Wotapka



New York's rent-stabilized tenants may be able to breathe easier for another eight years.

Gov. David Paterson Wednesday proposed a tenant-friendly amendment package to the state's rent laws set to expire next year. In addition to the eight-year extension until 2019, the measures would make it more difficult for landlords to charge higher market-rate rents.

He also sought to address the chaos from a court ruling last year that rolled back rents at Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town, a major New York City apartment complex.

"During these difficult times it is essential that we do all we can to preserve rent regulation while restoring certainty to the rent regulation system and making it more transparent, manageable and equitable," Paterson said in the announcement.

The amendment still has to be passed by the state's Legislature, though it's unclear if it will be addressed this year. Should it languish, it could be left for the next governor.

Rent-regulated are units most common in New York City, where they're coveted by anyone looking to avoid paying some of the nation's priciest rents. About half of the city's 2 million apartments fall under rent stabilization, according to the Rent Stabilization Board. Many landlords aim to flee the program, knowing they can make more money in the free market.

In Manhattan, a stabilized two-bedroom goes for a median \$1,400, compared with \$2,400 for market rate, according to the Board's website. Rent regulation also limits the annual rent increases.

Paterson, who has been criticized for renting a stabilized apartment in Harlem, clearly wants more units kept in the program. Since 1993, apartments could be removed when a tenant's rent exceeds \$2,000 a month, the renter's income for two consecutive years exceeds \$175,000 or when an apartment with a legal monthly rent topping \$2,000 becomes vacant. Paterson proposes raising the threshold to \$3,000 per month.

"We're going to fight over the \$3,000 number," said Steven Spinola, president of the Real Estate Board of New York, a trade group. "Manhattan would be the only place" rent would be high enough to pull apartments from the program.

Paterson also addresses the uncertainty surrounding last year's Court of Appeals ruling that the owners of Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town illegally charged market-rate rents on some apartments. The decision, which affects an estimated 40,000 units citywide, didn't address for what time frame tenants could demand refunds, nor did it tackle damages. The governor aims to set a four-year limit. Owners making the refund offer in good faith wouldn't have to pay damages or interest.