

Hi-Riser

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CONDO LEADERS SAY GOVERNOR MAY AFFIRM SPRINKLER DEADLINE

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With the state legislative session over, condo residents, managers, board members and attorneys all have new and updated laws with which to familiarize themselves.

Many still await the signature of Gov. Charlie Crist, and one, SB 714, could be vetoed, many in the condo lobby say.

SB 714 pushes back the sprinkler retrofit deadline from 2014 to 2025, giving associations more time to install fire sprinkler systems in high-rises seven stories or more.

Some condo leaders said it is likely Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink will urge Crist to veto the bill, forcing associations to find a quicker way to install sprinkler systems, fire alarms and elevator generators. That would be a problem for many associations, said Charlotte Greenberg, president of the Broward Coalition of Condominium, Homeowner and Community Organizations.

"[Condo associations are] struggling to survive. Where would they borrow the money?" Greenberg said. "[This session] was so very frustrating, unnecessarily so."

Sink's office said that while she has not issued any veto orders for the bill, she is concerned that the sprinkler retrofit deadline will be pushed back.

Donna Berger, attorney with Katzman Garfinkel Rosenbaum and executive director of the Community Advocacy Network, wrote a letter to Sink and Crist, urging them to think of the unit owners before vetoing.

Berger said she is also encouraging unit owners to write their own letters.

"We've been fighting this for a couple of years," Berger said.

The bill, co-sponsored by Rep. Elyn Bogdanoff, R-Fort Lauderdale, will also prohibit associations from forcing individual insurance policies on unit owners.

Backed by Rep. Julio Robaina, R-Miami, HB 1397 failed to pass. The bill focused on community and homeowners association reform and included a provision requiring board members to schedule meetings a year in advance, with a majority vote to reschedule.

"Proposed legislative changes like this bear no relationship to the reality of operating a community association," Berger said.

Another bill that failed to pass was SB 880, which would have allowed condo associations to suspend the rights of delinquent owners to use common areas such as the pool, and would have allowed associations to collect maintenance fees from a tenant in a delinquent unit.

Certain condos will be eligible for loans to protect each unit from weatherization and hurricane-wind mitigation due to HB 1495.

Condo associations with less than 200 units that were permitted for construction on or before March 1, 2002 and are within wind-borne debris areas can receive loans allowing for the purchase and installation of weatherization and hurricane mitigation measures.

However, these loans are on a first-come, first-served basis through the state's Department of Financial Services.