



BRATTLEBORO AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
*Promoting a Vibrant and Diverse Business Community*

Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce

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House Commerce and Economic Development Committee

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I'm the executive director of the Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am here to voice support for H.816 on behalf of our Chamber members who operate bed and breakfasts in the Greater Brattleboro area. They are concerned about individuals who operate similar businesses, but aren't being held to the same standards by the state.

First, I want to stress that I am here not because the bed and breakfast owners are afraid of competition; to the contrary, they welcome it. What concerns them is that the laws and regulations that they must follow are not being applied to all businesses or individuals who offer accommodations through internet-lodging platforms - the most recognized name is Airbnb, but there are a number of other such platforms that serve the country and the world.

This is an issue that not only impacts bed and breakfasts. It also affects hotels, motels, inns and other lodging establishments.

In Vermont bed and breakfasts, hotels and other lodging establishments are required to:

- Pay Meals and Rooms Tax
- Register the business with the Secretary of State's office
- Register for a Vermont Business Tax Account and license with the Department of Taxes
- Obtain a Lodging Establishment License through the Department of Health
- And in Brattleboro they are required to obtain a business license

But it's not all about licenses and taxes. It's also about the health and safety of the guests.

In Vermont bed and breakfasts, hotels and other lodging establishments are subject to:

- Inspections by the Department of Public Safety, Fire Safety Division

- Inspections by the Health Department regulations re: rooms, furnishings and bedding and drinking water standards.

The Vermont Tax Department defines a hotel as “an establishment that holds itself out to the public by offering sleeping accommodations for a charge. This includes rooms in private houses and other types of privately owned lodging if you rent out your accommodations for 15 days or more in a calendar year.”

The Health Department defines lodging as “Establishments, including hotels, bed and breakfasts, motels, tourist homes, etc. that advertise lodging to the traveling public.”

Like B&Bs, hotels and motels, internet-lodging platforms offer accommodations for rent. According to the Airbnb Website: “Whether an apartment for a night, a castle for a week, or a villa for a month, Airbnb connects people to unique travel experiences, at any price point, in more than 34,000 cities and 190 countries . . . . Airbnb is a trusted community marketplace for people to list, discover, and book unique accommodations around the world.”

Clearly, online-lodging platforms fit the state’s definition of a lodging establishment and, therefore, should be subject to the state’s rules and regulations governing such businesses.

We support a study of the laws and enforcement practices regarding lodging establishments and look forward to their equal application. Proper enforcement ensures the health and safety of guests and means the state will have the benefit of the Meals and Rooms Tax revenue that is currently not being collected.

Thank you again for allowing me to be here today. Your attention to this matter is greatly appreciated.