

Profit versus tenants' rights set for showdown

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income is relatively high, apartment owners can charge more per square foot, he contended.

OWNERS CAN refurbish one or two vacant apartments at a time to test the market with upgraded rents," Trimble said. "Older tenants may resist, but new tenants are willing to pay. Some people will have to move."

Berman's five bills were considered Nov. 21 by the House Consumer's Committee and only one is scheduled to be heard by the full House.

Reported out of committee was House Bill 4525, which would require landlords to give tenants notice of increases by Jan. 31 each year.

UNDER THE measure, landlords must inform tenants in writing of the percentage of increase to be expected and the actual increase must fall within 2 percent of that.

Tenants must be given at least twice as long before the termination date of the lease as the tenant has to give landlords notice of termination.

House Bill 4590, which would prohibit landlords from increasing security deposits when the rents are increased, was withdrawn. House Bills 4595-4597 — allowing tenants to form organizations and providing for investment of security deposits so interest would accrue to the tenant — were tabled.

"NONE OF the bills have anything to do with rents," Berman said in a telephone interview. "The proposed legislation is trying to give tenants a fairer shake and improve their relations with landlords."

"More renters tell me that their rates are raised more than once a year, and they can't sign leases. A few members of the Apartment Association of

Michigan say they're appalled by the rent situation, but they still oppose my bills."

SOFTENING THE tough stand taken by speakers at the Nov. 20 seminar was Sheila Sloan of Sheila Sloan Public Re-

lations, Southfield.

Higher occupancy rates and increased rents are helping apartment owners gain lost ground, she said. But raising rents can be a "public relations disaster."

"Legislation is being introduced to

encourage tenant unions because tenants believe management is insensitive to their needs," Sloan said.

"IF YOU give 30 days notice of a big rent increase and intimate tenants can take it or leave it, that's a public rela-

tions disaster.

"It's best to send a good news letter to tenants justifying the rent rise by announcing the upgrading and improving of the project to enhance the quality of life. Tenants don't want to hear about landlords having to catch up or about

economics. There's a human side to dealing with tenants."

Eric Lutz of Eric Lutz Inc. said "merchants of space," faced with rent lags in apartment projects, must consider cosmetics to make economics work in today's economy.

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