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The original instrument and the following digest, which constitutes no part of the legislative instrument, were prepared by Julie J. Baxter.

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DIGEST

SB 174 Original

2015 Regular Session

Broome

Proposed law provides that proposed law shall apply only to a lease agreement for a residential dwelling consisting of: (1) a single-family house leased by an owner who owns more than three such single-family homes at any one time; or (2) rooms or units in dwellings containing residential living quarters occupied or intended to be occupied by more than four families living independently of each other.

Proposed law provides that the following definitions shall be applicable to proposed law:

- (1) "Domestic abuse" includes but is not limited to physical or sexual abuse and any offense against the person as defined in the Criminal Code of Louisiana, except negligent injury and defamation, committed by one family or household member against another. "Domestic abuse" also includes abuse of adults as defined in R.S. 15:1503 when committed by an adult child or adult grandchild.
- (2) "Family member" means a spouse, former spouse, parent, child, stepparent, stepchild, foster parent or foster child, grandparent or grandchild who resides or formerly resided with the lessee.
- (3) "Household member" means a household member as defined in R.S. 14:35.3.
- (4) "Reasonable documentation" shall be exclusively confined to mean any of the following documents:
  - (a) A report, record, or protective order from a law enforcement agency, court, or state or federal agency.
  - (b) A completed Certification of Domestic Abuse form as set forth in proposed law, signed under oath by a qualified third party as defined in proposed law.
  - (c) At the discretion of the lessor, a statement or other evidence provided by the lessee.
- (5) "Qualified third party" means one of the following professionals from whom the lessee or the lessee's family or household member has sought assistance relating to the relevant domestic abuse or effects of that abuse:
  - (a) A physician as defined in R.S. 37:1262;
  - (b) A licensed mental health professional as defined in R.S. 40:2153; or

- (c) A representative or employee of a community-based shelter as licensed by the Department of Children and Family Services pursuant to R.S. 46:2124.

Proposed law provides that no lease agreement shall provide that a lessee: (a) agrees to waive or limit the lessee's right to summon, or any other person's right to summon, a law enforcement officer or other emergency assistance in response to an emergency, or (b) agrees to payment of monetary penalties or otherwise to any penalties under the lease for the lessee summoning, or for any other person summoning, a law enforcement officer or other emergency assistance in response to an emergency.

Proposed law provides that a lease provision prohibited under proposed law shall be null, void, and unenforceable.

Proposed law provides that the lessor of a lease agreement shall not: (1) refuse to enter into the lease agreement on the basis that an applicant, or that applicant's family or household member, is or has been a victim of domestic abuse, or on the basis of activity directly related to domestic abuse, if that applicant otherwise qualifies to enter into a lease agreement, or (2) terminate the lease agreement, fail to renew the lease agreement, or issue an eviction notice or notice to vacate on the basis that a lessee, or the lessee's family or household member, is or has been a victim of domestic abuse, or on the basis of activity directly related to domestic abuse, if the lessee, or the lessee's family or household member, is the victim of such abuse. Proposed law further provides that it shall not be the responsibility of the lessor to discover, to ascertain or to provide documentation that an applicant or lessee, or a family or household member, is a victim of domestic abuse.

Proposed law provides that if a lessee seeks to receive from a lessor one of the accommodations afforded under proposed law to a domestic abuse victim, the lessee must do all of the following:

- (1) Assert orally or in writing to the lessor that the lessee, or the lessee's family or household member, is a domestic abuse victim and seeks a particular accommodation afforded under proposed law.
- (2) Provide to the lessor written proof of such status by, within 30 days of the incident which the lessee claims gave rise to domestic abuse victim status, presenting to the lessor reasonable documentation of that domestic abuse victim status as defined under proposed law.
- (3) Otherwise meet or agree to fulfill all requirements of a lessee under the lease agreement.
- (4) If requested by the lessor, provide in writing the name and address of the person named as the defendant, perpetrator or abuser in an order of protection or a law enforcement agency, court or state or federal agency report, if known by the victim.

Proposed law provides that, if a lessee fulfills all of the requirements of proposed law, the lessor shall grant the lessee the specific accommodations in proposed law which the lessee requests, consisting of either early termination or bifurcation of the lease. Proposed law provides that for early termination: (a) If the lessee requests early termination of the lease agreement, the lessor shall

terminate the lessee's lease agreement early on a mutually agreed upon date within the next 30 days. Provides that, except for rent already owed or to be paid through the early termination date of the lease, and any previous obligations outstanding on that date, the lessee's rights and obligations under the lease agreement shall be terminated effective as of that early termination date and the lessee shall vacate the residential dwelling by that date to avoid liability for future rent and shall not incur early termination penalties or fees. (b) Provides that in such cases where the lessee requests early termination of the lease agreement, then whether the lessee is solely or jointly liable on the lease agreement, the lessee is liable only for rent owed or paid through the early termination date of the lease and any previous obligations outstanding on that date. Provides that the amount due from the lessee shall be paid to the lessor on or before the date the lessee vacates the dwelling. Provides that if the lessee has paid a lessee's deposit pursuant to R.S. 9:3251, the lessor shall not withhold the deposit for reasons of early termination of the lease under proposed law. Proposed law further provides that the lessor may withhold the deposit for the payment of damages or as permitted under R.S. 9:3251.

Proposed law provides that for bifurcation, if there are multiple lessees who are parties to a lease agreement, and the lessee who fulfills the requirements of proposed law requests early termination and bifurcation of the lease agreement, the lessor shall terminate the lease on the early termination date for the other lessees as well.

Proposed law provides that the lessees who are not victims of domestic abuse, excluding any person named as a perpetrator or abuser in an order of protection or in a law enforcement agency, court, or state or federal agency report or other reasonable documentation of the domestic abuse claimed, shall be released from any obligations due under the previously existing lease agreement. Proposed law further provides that the remaining lessees or a lawful occupant shall be permitted to enter into a new lease with the lessor if the remaining lessees or lawful occupant meet all the current application and lease requirements.

Proposed law provides that nothing in proposed law shall be construed to limit a lessor's right to refuse to enter into a lease agreement, terminate a lease agreement, fail to renew a lease agreement, or issue an eviction notice or notice to vacate to a lessee or tenants pursuant to C.C.P. Art.4701, et seq., for actions unrelated to the act of domestic abuse. Proposed law further provides that nothing in proposed law shall limit a lessee's obligation as required by a lease agreement between the lessor and lessee.

Proposed law provides for a form for a Certification of Domestic Abuse.

Proposed law provides that a civil action for enforcement of rights granted pursuant to proposed law may be commenced in state district court within two years of an alleged violation of proposed law. Proposed law further provides that, in the interests of justice, a plaintiff may seek to proceed in forma pauperis and may seek the appointment of counsel by the court to represent him in the action, and the court shall render such orders as are equitable.

Proposed law provides that in the civil action the court may grant as relief, as it deems appropriate, any permanent or temporary injunction, temporary restraining order, or other order and may award

to the prevailing plaintiff actual damages and punitive damages, together with court costs and reasonable attorney fees.

Effective August 1, 2015.

(Adds R.S. 9:3262)