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Senate fails to address housing crisis for middle income families.

OLYMPIA, WA - The state Senate's failure to act on House Bill 1727 may mean fewer Washington residents will be able to find affordable homes. The bill became entangled in Senate procedures late Wednesday, holding up consideration of the bill before the April 13 deadline for approval by both the House and Senate. The bill sponsors will now seek to exempt the bill from the Legislative deadline, which will otherwise bar further consideration of the measure.

"It's very frustrating to know that the bill had strong support in the Senate and yet senators didn't have the opportunity to vote on it," said Steve Francks, Washington REALTORS® Chief Executive Officer. "With citizens across the state demanding a solution to the affordable home crisis, the Legislature should make it a priority to adopt strategies to expand the supply of middle-income homes and ease market pressures."

The bill received the unanimous approval of the House Local Government Committee, Senate Government Operations Committee, and the full House of Representatives.

HB 1727 was scheduled for a vote on Wednesday evening. But amendments to the bill were challenged as not consistent with its title. The Senate set aside the bill while awaiting a legal ruling. Meantime, the April 13 deadline for bill consideration passed before the Senate could take up the bill again.

"Our underlying legislation addressing the housing crisis enjoyed strong support and had the votes to pass had it been brought to a vote," said Francks. "It is astonishing that the Senate would ignore this measure when more than two-thirds of

Washington residents say they are concerned about the seeming unstoppable rise in home prices.”

According to a January survey by the Washington Realtors, public concern about rapid increases in home prices and the lack of affordable homes has risen 18 percent since last fall. More than two-thirds of Washington residents list the phenomenon as a top concern and believe communities should allow a wider variety of home choices, such as cottages, accessory housing and town homes.

HB 1727, sponsored by Rep. Larry Springer (D-Kirkland), ensures communities provide homes for growing populations and allows innovative uses of land to meet housing needs. The bill encourages counties and cities to consult with each other when modifying areas designated for growth, and allows local government to establish sub-regions to address housing needs associated with the growth in jobs.

Home prices have risen by more than 60 percent statewide over the last five years, far outpacing the increase in wages – up only about 14 percent over the same period. The resulting gap has left Washington with the worst home affordability rate in 15 years, according to the Center for Real Estate Research at Washington State University. The Center’s Housing Affordability Index showed that first-time home-buyers only have enough income to buy a home in Adams and Benton counties. The crisis in home affordability is forcing people to drive further and further from their places of work to find affordable homes. The result is greater congestion on state highways, more air pollution and increased pressure on commuters.

“If the Legislature concludes the session without addressing this key aspect of quality of life for the middle class, they will have let down families across the state,” said Francks.

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