
City Council Members Clash with Airbnb Officials at Hearing

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At a contentious hearing Friday, City Council members clashed with officials from the home-rental site Airbnb as the Council considers a bill that seeks to crack down on illegal hotel operators. NY1's Bobby Cuza filed the following report.

Both sides - Airbnb supporters and opponents - had their troops out Friday. But the real faceoff Friday was inside City Council chambers, where Airbnb officials' repeated evasiveness led to strong words from City Councilman Jumaane Williams.

"You're doing yourself no favors here today, sir. You are making no friends in the

"In our view, it's an extreme measure that shocks the conscience," said Christopher Lehane, Airbnb's global head of public policy. "What we're very concerned about is, are these \$10- to \$50,000 fines going to be imposed on that teacher who leaves for a weekend and is using her home to try to generate some supplemental revenue."

Indeed, under state law, it is illegal for anyone in an apartment building to rent out their entire apartment for less than 30 days. But Council members say the law wouldn't target individuals trying to make ends meet, and that to suggest otherwise was disingenuous.

"Sir, I think all you do is, you are a deceiver. And I think Airbnb is a deceiver," Williams said. "And you're using middle-class people, and you're using black and Latino homeowners to continue your deception."

For all the hostility inside Friday's hearing, Council members did huddle with Airbnb officials following their testimony and say they're confident the two sides can work towards a compromise. That could include the sharing of Airbnb data that would allow the city to identify the worst violators.

"The sooner we can tweak the law to make it one that clearly targets the worst offenders, I'm ready to move forward," said City Councilwoman Helen Rosenthal of Manhattan.

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