

COUNTY OF ERIE

EC LEG JUL 10 '23 AM 11:44

LOCAL LAW INTRO NO. 3-2-2023

LOCAL LAW NO. ____-2023

A LOCAL LAW entitled: The Occupancy Tax Modernization Act

BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNTY OF ERIE AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. Legislative Intent.

- a. In 1974, Erie County, through the passage of Chapter 664 of the New York Sessions Law of the same year was granted the power to impose an occupancy tax on per diem rentals of rooms for persons renting those rooms for limited periods of time. The Erie County occupancy tax was established via local law by the Erie County Legislature in September 1974 and was amended via local law in 1975, 1983, 1987, and 2007. There has not been a comprehensive review of the various local laws governing the occupancy tax nor an effort to modernize and update the law in decades.
- b. The Erie County Legislature (“Legislature”) hereby finds that the forums and mechanisms for renting rooms to non-permanent residents has evolved over the past half century with the widespread per diem rental of short-term and vacation rental properties in Erie County and elsewhere, via various online hosting platforms such as Airbnb, VRBO, Homestay, or by other means.
- c. Unlike other counties in New York State that maintain occupancy tax collection agreements with hosting or “home-sharing” platforms such as Airbnb, Erie County does not have any such agreements with such platforms and/or operators that provide short term and vacation rental properties.
- d. The Legislature finds that there are unjustified variances and inconsistencies with this state of affairs, as hotels are required to collect taxes from guests pursuant to the County of Erie’s hotel occupancy tax law, but owners of other per diem rented rooms for occupancy, and operators and platforms for short term and vacation rentals have not been collecting such tax, are not readily subject to any health and safety regulations, and are not registered with the County, despite offering services which are identical or substantially similar to traditional hotels and motels.
- e. The Legislature finds that the law should apply equally to all individuals and entities engaged in the rental of temporary accommodations, and that the current state of affairs has resulted in an unequal “playing field” for traditional hotels and motels compared to other types of short term and vacation rental properties. The Legislature further finds that this discrepancy also results in a loss of occupancy tax revenue to Erie County and its taxpayers.

- f. The Legislature finds that, pursuant to Chapter 614 of the Laws of 1974 of the State of New York, operators of these transient lodging facilities should be subject to the same occupancy taxes as their counterparts in the traditional lodging industry to help ensure fairness across the lodging sector in Erie County.
- g. The Erie County Legislature hereby finds that there is a need to bring the definition and administration of occupancy tax into the 21st Century by updating the various functions of the tax to meet the demands of the modern short-term rental industry within the parameters of the taxing authority delegated by the State of New York.
- h. The Legislature hereby intends this that this Local Law will perform the following functions and beneficial purposes:
 - 1. Clarify the reach of the tax to include non-traditional short-term and vacation rentals within Erie County;
 - 2. Require all operators of properties used for non-permanent occupancy, or short-term and vacation rentals to register with the County for the collection of the tax;
 - 3. Bring all manner of short-term rental properties above ground to better ensure the safety of occupants and quality of life for the broader community;
 - 4. Modernize and enhance enforcement capabilities of the County to pursue scofflaws who fail to collect and remit the tax or misappropriate the same;
 - 5. Allow hosting platforms that have executed voluntary collection agreements with the County to collect and remit the tax on the operator's behalf;
 - 6. Establish the methodology used to determine taxable rent for all properties used for transient lodging. Accordingly, collection and remittance of the tax for short-term and vacation rentals will be principally placed on the corporate hosting platform through a voluntary collection agreement and secondarily placed on individual operators opting not to enter into any such agreement;
 - 7. Reinvest in the continued development of the tourism to maintain and enhance infrastructure, create economic opportunity for residents, and increase the recreational appeal of Erie County; and
- i. Therefore, except for the limited purposes provided by Section 25 of this Local Law, Erie County Local Law No. 12-1974, Erie County Local Law No. 8-1975, Erie County Local Law No. 5-1983, Erie County Local Law No. 1-1987, and Erie County Local Law No. 4-2007 are hereby repealed in their entirety and replaced with this Local Law.

Section 2. Definitions.

- a. Charter. The Charter of Erie County as established by Local Law 1-1959 and amended thereafter.
- b. Clerk. The elected Clerk of Erie County.
- c. Comptroller. The elected Comptroller of Erie County.
- d. Exempt Entity. A government, corporation, or association exempt from taxation under Section 4 of this local law.
- e. Hosting Platform. An application, technology, and/or similarly based service through which a third party desiring to offer an accommodation (a “host”) and a third party desiring to book an accommodation (a “guest”) have the opportunity to communicate, negotiate, and consummate a booking transaction for transient lodging accommodations pursuant to a direct agreement between a host and guest to which the hosting platform is not a party but still facilitates payments for rent on behalf of or for the host, and/or otherwise acts as intermediary between the host and the guest. Merely publishing an advertisement for transient accommodations does not make the publisher a hosting platform.
- f. Hotel. “Hotel” or “motel” shall mean and include any facility providing lodging on an overnight basis and shall include those facilities designated and commonly known as per diem rentals, “bed and breakfast” and “tourist” facilities. For the purposes of this Local Law, the terms “hotel” and “short-term rental” shall be interchangeable.
- g. Operator. Any person or entity operating premises where short-term rental occupancy transactions are conducted in Erie County, including but not limited to the owner or proprietor of such premises, lessee, sublessee, mortgagee in possession, licensee or any other person otherwise operating such premises.
- h. Occupancy. The use or possession, or the right to the use or possession of any room in a premises that is the subject of short-term rental occupancy transactions.
- i. Permanent Resident. A person occupying any room or rooms in a premises that is the subject of a short-term rental occupancy transaction for at least thirty consecutive days.
- j. Permanent Occupancy. The rental of a room for longing for a period of greater than thirty days.
- k. Person. An individual, partnership, society, association, joint stock company, corporation, limited liability company, estate, receiver, trustee, assignee, referee, and any other person acting in a fiduciary or representative capacity, whether appointed by a court or otherwise, and any combination of the foregoing.

- l. Rent. The consideration received for occupancy valued in money, whether received in monetary form or otherwise.
- m. Room. Any room or rooms of any kind in any part or portion of a premises that is the subject of a short-term rental occupancy transaction, which is available for or let out for any purpose other than a place of assembly.
- n. Return. Any return filed or required to be filed as herein provided.
- o. Sheriff. The elected Sheriff of Erie County.
- p. Short-Term Rental. A building or portion of it which is regularly used, advertised for use, or kept open as such for lodging on an overnight basis. Such use, advertisement, public availability need not be continuous to be considered regular. The term 'short-term rental' includes a hotel, motel, hostel, apartment hotel, motor court or inn, boardinghouse or club, campground with cabins, home-sharing property or vacation rental, or similar hotel or motel type of accommodations by whatever name designated, whether or not meals are served, and shall include those facilities commonly known as 'bed-and-breakfast' and 'tourist' facilities. "Short-term" and "vacation rentals" shall mean and include those units rented or leased to occupants – other than permanent residents – that are furnished apartments or living units in or consisting of a dwelling place ordinarily occupied for residential purposes or location that is otherwise made available for sleeping accommodations, directly by the owner or through an owner's agent or hosting platform. A 'short-term rental' shall not include month-to-month residential lease agreements where the tenant occupies a unit as his or her primary residence.

Section 3. Imposition of Tax.

- a. Except as otherwise provided by this Section, on and after the first day of June, 2023, there is hereby imposed and there shall be paid a tax of three percent upon the rent for every occupancy of a room or rooms in the County.
- b. For all short-term rental transactions where rental capacity of the premises exceeds thirty (30) rooms, the rate of tax on occupancy shall be five percent.
- c. If the charge for occupancy of a room includes only the cost of the room, board, and cleaning fees, any other charges that are separately stated and are only incurred at the option of the occupant and/or charged by a hosting platform shall not be included in the calculation of the occupancy tax imposed by this Local Law.
- d. If the operator does not separate the charge for room and board from other charges, excluding cleaning fees but including those added by a hosting platform, the entire charge to the occupant is taxable until the occupant becomes a permanent resident as defined by this Local Law.
- e. No tax shall be imposed upon a permanent resident as defined by this Local Law.

Section 4. Exempt Organizations

- a. Except as otherwise provided in this Local Law, any use or occupancy by any of the following shall not be subject to the tax imposed by this local law.
 1. The State of New York, or any of its agencies, instrumentalities, public corporations (including public corporations created pursuant to agreement or compact with another state or Canada), improvement districts or political subdivisions of the State;
 2. The United States of America, or any of its agencies and instrumentalities, insofar as it is immune from taxation;
 3. The United Nations or other world-wide international organizations of which the United States is a member; and
 4. Any corporation, association, trust or community chest, fund or foundation, organized and operated exclusively for religious, charitable or education purposes, or for the prevention of cruelty to children or animals, and no part of the net earnings of which inures to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual and no part of the activities of which is carrying out propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation; provided, however, that nothing in this paragraph shall include an organization operated for the primary purpose of carrying on a trade or business for profit, whether or not all of its profits are payable to one or more organizations described in this paragraph.
- b. Where any organization described in paragraph three (3) of subdivision (a) of this Section conducts its activities in furtherance of the purposes for which it was organized, and, as part of said activities, it engages in short-term rental transactions on the premises in which such not-for-profit activities are conducted, occupancy of rooms in the premises and rent therefrom received by such corporation or association shall not be subject to tax hereunder.

Section 5. Territorial Limitations

The tax imposed by this local law shall apply only within the territorial limits of the County of Erie.

Section 6. Registration

- a. Within ten days after the effective date of this local law, or in the case of operators commencing business after such effective date, within three days after such commencement or opening, every owner and/or operator shall file with the Comptroller a Certification of Registration in a form prescribed by the Comptroller.
- b. The Comptroller shall, within five business days after such registration issue without charge to each operator a Certificate of Authority empowering such operator to collect the tax from the occupant and duplicate thereof for each additional short-term rental of such

operator. Each certificate or duplicate shall be certified, bear the seal of Erie County, and state the short-term rental to which it is applicable. Such Certificate of Authority shall be prominently displayed by the operator in such manner that it may be seen and come to the notice of all occupants and persons seeking occupancy.

- c. Where a host or operator uses a hosting platform that has executed a voluntary collection agreement with the County, such host or operator shall submit an application for a Certificate of Authority clearly stating all information required under applicable law but may otherwise designate such hosting platform as primarily and solely liable for collection and remittance of the tax.
- d. If a Certificate of Authority is lost, stolen, or otherwise misplaced by an operator, such operator may apply, in a form prescribed by the Comptroller, for a replacement Certificate of Authority. Replacements shall be certified and issued to the operator at a cost of \$50.00.
- e. Failure to register a short-term rental with the Comptroller as required by this Section shall result in the imposition of a penalty amounting to one hundred dollars per day of non-registration. The Comptroller may, upon a showing of good cause by an owner or operator, waive up to 75% of the total amount of penalties incurred under this Subsection. Good cause shall be determined by the Comptroller on a case-by-case basis and shall require, at minimum, a demonstration that the owner or operator lacked intent to violate the provisions of this Section and exercised reasonable diligence.
- f. Such certificates shall be non-assignable and non-transferrable and shall be surrendered immediately to the Comptroller upon:
 - 1. the cessation of business at the short-term rental;
 - 2. the sale, lease, assignment, or other transfer to another host or operator; or
 - 3. the designated hosting platform service named as designee on the certificate provided by this Section is sold, renamed, or otherwise transferred.
 - a. For the purposes of this Subsection, a change in ownership of the owner, hosting platform, operator, or the parent company of the same greater than or equal to 50% shall be considered a transfer.
- g. Violation of Subsection (e) of this Section shall immediately void any Certificate of Authority previously issued, in addition to any additional penalties otherwise imposed by this Local Law.

Section 7. Administration and Collection

- a. The tax imposed by this local law shall be administered and collected by the Comptroller of the County of Erie or the Comptroller's designee by such means and in such manner as

are other taxes which are now collected and administered by such officers in accordance with the Charter or as otherwise are provided by this Local Law.

- b. The tax to be collected pursuant to this Local Law shall be stated, charged, and shown separately from the rent. At the time when the occupancy is arranged, contracted for or charged for, and upon any and all evidence of occupancy, any charge made shall be paid by the occupant to the operator as trustee for and on behalf of the County.
- c. The operator shall be liable for the collection thereof and for the tax. The operator and any officer of any corporate operator shall be personally liable for the tax collected or required to be collected under this Local Law, and the operator shall have the same right in respect to collecting the tax from the occupant. In respect to non-payment of the tax by the occupant payable at the time such tax shall become due and owing, the operator retains all applicable rights including, but not limited to, rights of eviction, repossession, and enforcement of any innkeeper's lien that the operator may have in the event of non-payment of rent by the occupant. An operator shall join the Comptroller as a party in any action or proceeding brought by the operator against an occupant under this Local Law.
- d. The tax imposed by this Local Law shall be paid upon any occupancy on and after the effective date of this Local Law except for any such occupancy reserved pursuant to a contract, lease or other arrangement made prior to such date. Where any tax has been paid hereunder upon any rent which has been ascertained to be worthless, the Comptroller may by regulation provide for credit and/or refund of the amount of such tax upon application therefore as provided by this Local Law.
- e. For the purpose of the proper administration of this Local Law and to prevent evasion of the tax hereby imposed, the following presumptions and burdens shall apply:
 - 1. It shall be presumed that all rents are subject to tax until the contrary is established.
 - 2. The burden of proving that a rent for occupancy is not taxable hereunder shall be upon the operator or the occupant.
 - 3. Where an occupant claims exemptions from the tax under the provisions of Section 4 of this Local Law, the rent shall be deemed taxable hereunder unless the operator shall receive from the occupant claiming such exemption a copy of a certificate issued by the Comptroller certifying that the named entity is exempt from taxation under Section 4 of this Local Law, together with a writing duly executed by the exempt entity named in the certificate issued by the Comptroller certifying that the occupant is its agent, representative or employee and that the occupancy is paid or to be paid by, and is necessary or required in the course of or in connection with the affairs of said exempt entity.
- f. A hosting platform may enter into a voluntary collection agreement with the County containing and specifying the following:

1. The hosting platform shall be solely responsible and liable for collecting and remitting the applicable tax to the County for booking transactions completed through the respective hosting platform for short-term rentals as defined by Subsection 2(l) of this local law.
 2. The host or operator of the short-term rental who is not the hosting platform shall not be responsible for collecting and remitting the tax to the County on any transaction for which it has received confirmation that the hosting platform has collected the aforementioned tax and remitted it back to the County pursuant to a voluntary collection agreement.
 3. Neither the County, its officers, agents, and employees, or a hosting platform, its officers, agents, and employees, shall be required or made to furnish a copy or any portion of a voluntary collection agreement entered into between the County and a hosting platform. The hosting platform shall furnish to any operator using the hosting platform, a certificate, in a form to be determined by the Comptroller, confirming the existence and enforceability of such agreement.
- g. Where an operator of a short-term rental uses a hosting platform that has voluntarily entered into and executed a voluntary collection agreement with the County pursuant to Subsection 7(f) of this Local Law, such hosting platform, for the purposes of tax registration, collection, and remittance under this Local Law, shall only be liable for transactions completed through the respective hosting platform pursuant to the terms of such agreement.
- h. If the operator of a short-term rental uses a hosting platform that has not entered into and executed an agreement with the County pursuant to Subsection 7(f) of this Local Law, such operator shall be liable for the collection and remittance of the tax.

Section 8. Records.

Every operator shall keep records of every occupancy and of all rent paid, charged or due thereon and of the tax payable thereon, in such form as the Comptroller may by regulation require. Such records shall be available for inspection and examination at any time upon demand by the Comptroller or the Comptroller's duly authorized agent or employee and shall be preserved for a period of five years.

Section 9. Returns.

- a. Every operator or, in the case where a hosting platform has entered into voluntary collection agreement pursuant to Section 7(f) of this Local Law, such hosting platform, shall file with the Comptroller a return of occupancy and of rents, and of the taxes payable thereon for quarterly periods ending the last day of February, May, August, and November of each year, on and after the effective date of this Local Law subject to the limitations prescribed by Section 7(d) of this Local Law.

- b. Such returns shall be filed within twenty days from the expiration of the period covered thereby. The Comptroller may permit or require returns to be made by other periods and upon such dates as the Comptroller or his duly authorized designee may specify. If the Comptroller deems it necessary in order to ensure the payment of the tax imposed by this Local Law, the Comptroller may require returns to be made for shorter periods than those prescribed pursuant to the foregoing provisions of this Section and upon such dates as the Comptroller may specify.
- c. Where a hosting platform has entered into a voluntary collection agreement with the County pursuant to Section 7(f) of this Local Law, the mechanism for increasing the number of return dates per calendar year must be included in such voluntary collection agreement.
- d. The form of returns shall be prescribed by the Comptroller and shall contain such information as the Comptroller may deem necessary for the proper administration of this Local Law. The Comptroller may require amended returns to be filed. Such returns shall be delivered not later than twenty days following notice of the operator or hosting platform by the Comptroller and shall contain the information specified in the notice.
- e. If the return required by this Section is not filed, or if a return as filed is incorrect or facially insufficient, the Comptroller shall take all necessary steps to enforce the filing of such return or a corrected return. The Comptroller shall not waive tax liability or suspend collection of tax imposed by this Local Law.

Section 10. Payment of Tax.

- a. At the time of the filing a return of occupancy and of rents, each operator, or, in the case where a hosting platform has entered into voluntary collection agreement pursuant to Section 7(f) of this Local Law, such hosting platform shall pay to the Comptroller the taxes imposed by this Local Law upon the rents required to be included in such return, as well as all other moneys collected by the operator or hosting platform acting or purporting to act under the provisions of this Local Law.
- b. Where the Comptroller, as a matter of discretion, deems it necessary to protect revenues to be obtained under this Local Law, the Comptroller may require any operator or hosting platform required to collect the tax imposed by this Local Law to file a bond with the Office of Comptroller, issued by a surety company authorized to transact business in the State of New York and approved by the Superintendent of the New York State Department of Financial Services as to the solvency and responsibility, in such amount as the Comptroller may fix to secure the payment of any tax and/or penalties and interest due or which may become due from such operator or hosting platform.
- c. In the event that the Comptroller determines that an operator or hosting platform is to file such bond, the Comptroller shall give notice to such operator or hosting platform to that effect. The Comptroller shall specify the amount of the bond required in writing and send it to such operator or hosting platform by certified mail at the address provided by such

operator or hosting platform. Evidence of such mailing shall create a presumption that such operator or hosting platform has been notified.

- d. Where an operator or hosting platform has been notified by the Comptroller that a bond shall be required pursuant to this Section, such operator or hosting platform shall file such bond within ten business days.
- e. An operator or hosting platform may, within ten business days, request in writing a hearing before the Comptroller or the Comptroller's designee at which the necessity, propriety, and amount of the bond shall be determined by the Comptroller, notice of which shall be sent by certified mail to the address provided by such operator or hosting platform. Such determination shall be final and shall be complied with within ten business days after the Comptroller notifies such operator or hosting platform.
- f. In lieu of the bond described in Subsection 10(b) of this Local Law, securities approved by the Comptroller or cash in such amount as the Comptroller may prescribe may be deposited. Such deposit shall be kept in the custody of the Comptroller who may at any time and without notice to the depositor, apply such deposit to any tax, interest, and/or penalties due. For that purpose, any securities may be sold by the Comptroller at public or private sale without notice to the depositor.

Section 11. Determination of Tax.

- a. If a return required by this Local Law is not filed, or if a return when filed is incorrect or facially insufficient, the amount of the tax due shall be determined by the Comptroller from such information as may be obtainable.
- b. If necessary, the tax may be estimated on the basis of external indices, including but not limited to, the number of rooms, location, scale of rents, comparable rents, type of accommodations and service, number of employees and publicly reported earnings.
- c. Notice of such determination shall finally and irrevocably fix the tax unless the person against whom it is assessed, within thirty days following receipt of notice from the Comptroller of such determination shall apply to the Comptroller for a hearing. The Comptroller may redetermine the same *sua sponte*.
- d. After such hearing, the Comptroller shall give notice of such determination to the person against whom the tax is assessed. The determination of the Comptroller shall be reviewable by the Supreme Court of Erie County for error, illegality, unconstitutionality, or abuse of discretion pursuant to Article Seventy-Eight of the Civil Practice Law and Rules.
- e. No party aggrieved by the determination of the Comptroller shall have standing to bring an action under Article 78 of the Civil Practice Law and Rules challenging the Comptroller's determination unless the amount of any tax sought to be reviewed, with any and all penalties and interest thereon, shall be first deposited with the Comptroller.

- f. In addition to the requirements of Section 11(e) of this Local Law, any party challenging the determination of the Comptroller pursuant to Article 78 of the Civil Practice Law and Rules shall first file with the Comptroller an undertaking, issued by a surety company authorized to transact business in the State of New York and approved by the Superintendent of the New York State Department of Financial Services as to solvency and responsibility, in such amount as a Justice of the Supreme Court of Erie County shall approve to the effect that if such proceeding is dismissed or the tax confirmed, the petitioner shall pay all costs and charges which may accrue in the prosecution of the proceeding.
- g. At the option of the petitioner, such undertaking filed with the Comptroller may be in a sum sufficient to cover the taxes, penalties and interest thereon stated in such determination plus the costs and charges which may accrue against it in the prosecution of the proceeding, in which event the applicant shall not be required to deposit such taxes, penalties, and interest as a condition precedent to the application.

Section 12. Disposition of Revenues.

- a. All revenues resulting from the imposition of the tax under this local law shall be paid into the treasury of the County and shall be credited to and deposited in the general fund of the County.
- b. Within sixty days of the effective date of this Local Law, the Comptroller shall create a special account, the sole purpose of which shall be the distribution of revenues to not-for-profit corporations and public benefit corporations dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of tourism in Erie County.
- c. Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, with respect to tax imposed by this Local Law on and after January 1, 2024, all revenue resulting from such tax, including any interest and/or penalties thereon, shall be credited to and deposited in the account created by the Comptroller pursuant to Subsection 12(b) of this Local Law.
- d. On and after January 1, 2024, all amounts deposited in the account created pursuant to Subsection 12(b) of this Local Law shall be made available and distributed to Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc. pursuant to a lawfully executed agreement between Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc. and the County of Erie. Such agreement shall include a requirement that Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc. shall submit an annual report to the County Executive, County Legislature, and County Comptroller concerning the expenditure of distributions received from the County, the annual budget and business plan, and any additional information as may be required pursuant to such agreement.
- e. An agreement entered into pursuant to Subsection 12(d) of this Local Law shall be approved as to form by the County Attorney, approved by the County Legislature, for a period of three years. The County Executive shall, no later than January 1 of each year of the agreement term, execute a renewal of such agreement and shall file such

renewal with the Clerk of the Legislature on or before the date of the first meeting of the Legislature for that year.

- f. In the event that Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc. to cease operations, lose or alter its 501(c)(6) status, or alter its purpose so that its mission and/or significant activities no longer fulfill the legislative intent of this Local Law, distributions pursuant to Subsection 12(c) of this Local Law shall immediately cease. Thereafter, all revenues received by the County pursuant to this Local Law shall be credited to and deposited in the general fund of the County until such time as an agreement is lawfully executed between the County and a qualifying entity to fulfill the legislative intent of this Local Law.
- g. All entities receiving distributions under this Section are subject to oversight by the Comptroller.

Section 13. Refunds.

- a. In the matter provided by this Section, the Comptroller shall refund or credit, without interest, any tax, penalty or interest erroneously, illegally or unconstitutionally collected or paid if application to the Comptroller for such refund shall be made within one year from the payment thereof. Whenever a refund is made by the Comptroller, the reasons therefore shall be stated in writing. Such application may be made by the occupant, operator, or hosting platform who has actually paid the tax.
- b. Such application may be made by an operator who has collected and paid over such tax to the Comptroller provided that the application is made within one year of the payment by the occupant to the operator, but not actual refund of moneys shall be made to such operator until it shall first be established to the satisfaction of the Comptroller, under such regulations as the Comptroller may prescribe, that the occupant has been repaid in the amount for which the application was made. The Comptroller may, in lieu of any refund, allow credit therefore on payments due from the applicant.
- c. An application for a refund or credit made as provided herein shall be deemed an application for a revision of any tax, penalty, or interest complained of and the Comptroller may receive evidence with respect thereto. After making a determination, the Comptroller shall notify the applicant who shall be entitled to review such determination by a proceeding pursuant to Article 78 of the Civil Practice Law and Rules, provided that such proceeding is instituted within thirty days following final notice of such determination and a final determination of tax due was not previously made. Such a proceeding shall not be instituted unless an undertaking is filed with the Comptroller in such amount and with such sureties as a Justice of the Supreme County of Erie County shall approve to the effect that if such proceedings be dismissed or the tax confirmed, the petitioner shall pay all costs and charges which may accrue in the prosecution of such proceeding.
- d. A person or entity shall not be entitled to a revision, refund or credit under this Section of a tax, interest or penalty which has been determined to be due pursuant to the provisions

of Section 13 of this Local Law where such person or entity has had a hearing or an opportunity for a hearing, as provided by this Section, or has failed to avail himself or herself of the remedies therein provided.

- e. No refund or credit shall be made of a tax, interest or penalty paid after a determination by the Comptroller made pursuant to Section 11 of this Local Law unless it is found that such determination was erroneous, illegal or unconstitutional, either by the Comptroller after a hearing pursuant to this Section, or by a Court under Article 78 of the Civil Practice Law and Rules, pursuant to the provisions of this Local Law.

Section 14. Reserves.

In cases where the occupant, operator, or hosting platform has applied for a refund and has instituted a proceeding under Article 78 of the Civil Practice Law and Rules to review an adverse determination on an application for refund pursuant to Section 13 of this Local Law, the comptroller shall set up appropriate reserves to meet any decision adverse to the County.

Section 15. Remedies Exclusive.

- a. The remedies provided by Section 11 and Section 13 of this Local Law shall be the exclusive remedies available to any entity for the review of tax liability imposed by this Local Law.
- b. No determination or proposed determination of tax or determination on any application for refund shall be enjoined or reviewed by an action for declaratory judgment, or any other action not brought under Article 78 of the Civil Practice Law and Rules.

Section 16. Proceedings for Recover Tax.

- a. Whenever any operator, hosting platform or other person or entity required to collect and remit occupancy tax pursuant to this Local Law fails to collect and remit and tax, penalty or interest imposed by this Local Law, the Erie County Attorney shall, upon the request of the Comptroller bring or cause to be brought an action to enforce the payment of the same on behalf of Erie County in the Supreme Court of Erie County within sixty days of such request. Should the County Attorney fail to bring such action within sixty days of the Comptroller's request, the Comptroller may bring or cause to be brought such action on behalf of Erie County.
- b. If the Comptroller believes that any such operator, hosting platform, or any other person is about to cease business, leave the state or remove or dissipate the assets out of which the tax or penalties might be satisfied, and that any such tax or penalty will not be paid when due, the Comptroller may declare such tax or penalty to be immediately due and payable and may issue a warrant immediately.
- c. As an additional or alternate remedy, the Comptroller may issue a warrant, directed to the Sheriff commanding the Sheriff or the Sheriff's duly authorized designee, to levy upon and

sell the real and personal property of the operator, hosting platform, or any person liable for the tax as described by this Local Law which may be found within Erie County for payment of the amount thereof with any penalties, interest, and the cost of executing the warrant.

- d. The Sheriff shall, within five business days following the receipt of the warrant, file a copy of such warrant with the Clerk. In the discretion of the Comptroller, a warrant of like terms, force and effect may be issued and directed to any officer or employee who shall have all the powers conferred by law upon the Sheriff under this Local Law, provided that such designee shall not be entitled to any fee or compensation in excess of the actual expenses paid in the performance of such duty.
- e. The Clerk shall, within five business days after a warrant has been filed by the Sheriff or the Comptroller's designee, enter in the judgment docket the name of the person or entity named in the warrant and the amount of the tax penalties, penalties, and interest for which the warrant is issued and the date when such copy is filed. For the purposes of this subsection, electronic recording of such information into the public-facing records database maintained by the Clerk shall constitute entry into the judgment docket. If the Clerk fails to enter such information onto the judgment docket within five days, the Comptroller may cause such information to be entered on his or her own accord. At such time as warrant information specified by this Subsection is entered onto the judgment docket, the amount of such warrant so docketed shall become a lien upon the interest in real and personal property of the operator, hosting platform, or persons liable for the tax pursuant to this Local Law against which the warrant is issued.
- f. The Sheriff or the Comptroller's designee shall proceed upon the warrant, in the same manner and with like effect, as provided by law in respect to executions issued against property upon judgments of a court of record.
- g. If a warrant is returned not satisfied in full, the Comptroller may, from time to time, issue new warrants and shall also have the same remedies to enforce the amount due thereunder as if the County had recovered judgment therefore and execution thereon had been returned unsatisfied.

Section 17. Notice Upon Sale.

- a. Whenever an operator shall make a sale, transfer or assignment in bulk or in part or the whole of a short-term rental operation or a lease, license or other agreement or right to possess or operate such short-term rental operation, the seller, transferor or assignor shall notify the Comptroller by registered mail of the proposed sale and of the price, terms and conditions thereof. Failure to do so shall result in a fine not to exceed ten thousand dollars imposed against the seller, transferor, assignor, and, in the case of a corporate entity, the officers, partners, members, or owners of such entity.
- b. Whenever an operator shall make a sale, transfer or assignment in bulk or in part or the whole of such operator's operation, lease, license or other agreement or right to possess or

operate such short-term rental operation, otherwise than in the ordinary and regular course of business, the purchaser, transferee or assignee, shall at least ten days before taking possession of the subject of said sale, transfer or assignment or paying therefore, notify the Comptroller by registered mail of the proposed sale and of the price, terms and conditions thereof whether or not the seller, transferor or assignor, has represented to or informed the purchaser, transferor or assignee that it owes any tax pursuant to this Local Law, and whether or not the purchaser, transferee or assignee has knowledge that such taxes are owing, and whether any such taxes are in fact owing.

- c. Whenever the purchaser, transferee or assignee shall fail to give notice to the Comptroller as required by the Subsection 17(a), or whenever the Comptroller shall inform the purchaser, transferee or assignee that a possible claim for such tax exists, any sums of money, property, causes of action, or other consideration which the purchaser, transferee or assignee is required to remit to the seller, transferor or assignor shall be subject to a first priority right and lien for any such taxes theretofore or thereafter determined to be due from the seller, transferor or assignor to the County.
- d. The purchaser, transferee or assignee is forbidden to transfer to the seller, transferor or assignor any such sums of money, property, causes of action, or other consideration to the extent of the amount of the County's claim.
- e. Where a purchaser, transferee or assignee fails to comply with the provisions of this Section, the purchaser, transferee or assignee shall be liable for the payment to the County of all taxes, penalties, and interest theretofore or thereafter determined to be due to the County from the seller, transferor, or assignor.
- f. All such liability imposed by this Section may be assessed and enforced in the same manner as the liability for the tax under this Local Law.

Section 18. General Powers of the Comptroller.

In addition to the powers granted to the Comptroller elsewhere in this Local Law, the Comptroller is hereby authorized and empowered:

- a. To make, adopt and amend rules and regulations appropriate to the carrying out of this local law and the purposes thereof;
- b. To extend for cause shown, the time of filing any return for a period not exceeding thirty days; and for cause shown, to remit penalties but not interest computed at the rate of six percent per annum; and to compromise disputed claims in connection with the taxes hereby imposed;
- c. To request information from the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance or the Treasury Department of the United States relative to any person; and to afford information to such tax commission or such treasury department relative to any person, notwithstanding any other provision of this Local Law to the contrary;

- d. To delegate any functions hereunder to the Deputy Comptroller or any officer or employee of the Office of Comptroller;
- e. To prescribe methods for determining the rents for occupancy and to determine the taxable and non-taxable rents;
- f. To require any operator within the County to keep detailed records of the nature and type of hotel maintained, nature and type of service rendered, the rooms available and rooms occupied daily, leases or occupancy contracts or arrangements, rents received, charged and accrued, the names and addresses of the occupants, whether or not any occupancy is claimed to be subject to the tax imposed by this Local Law, and to furnish such information upon request to the Comptroller;
- g. To require any operator within the County to maintain any and all records required by this Local Law for a concrete length of time in excess of the five-year period required under Section 8 of this Local Law not to exceed five additional years;
- h. To permit an operator or hosting platform, upon a showing of good cause, to enter into an agreement with the County allowing the operator or hosting platform to make periodic payments in a manner and at such intervals to be prescribed by the Comptroller, provided that no such payment plan exceeds two years following the date that the return was due pursuant to Section 9 of this Local Law;
- i. To assess and determine the taxes imposed under this Local Law.

Section 19. Administration of Oaths.

- a. The Comptroller or the Comptroller's duly authorized employees or agents shall have power to administer oaths and take affidavits in relation to any matter or proceeding in the exercise of their powers and duties under this Local Law. The Comptroller shall have power to subpoena and require the attendance of witnesses and the production of books, papers and documents to secure information pertinent to the performance of this duties hereunder and of the enforcement of this Local Law and to examine them in relation thereto, and to issue commissions for the examination of witnesses who are out of state or unable to attend in person or excused from attendance.
- b. A Justice of the Supreme Court of Erie County either in court or at chambers shall have power to summarily enforce by proper proceedings the attendance and testimony of witnesses and the production and examination of books, papers and documents called for by the subpoena of the Comptroller under this Local Law.
- c. Any person who shall refuse to testify or to produce books or records or who shall testify falsely in any material matter pending before the Comptroller under this Local Law shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, punishment for which shall be a fine of not more than five

thousand dollars or imprisonment for not more than one year, or both such fine and imprisonment.

- d. The officers who serve the summons or subpoena of the Comptroller and witnesses attending in response thereto shall be entitled to the same fees as are allowed to officers and witnesses in civil cases in courts of record, except as herein otherwise provided. Such officers shall be the Sheriff of Erie County, the Sheriff's duly appointed deputies or any officers or employees of the Comptroller who have been designated by the Comptroller to serve such process.

Section 20. Reference to Tax.

- a. Whenever reference is made in placards, promotion, publication or other form of public-facing signage or advertisement to the tax imposed by this Local Law, such reference shall be substantially in the following form: "Tax on occupancy of rooms for short-term accommodation."
- b. Whenever reference is made in any bill, receipt, statement or other evidence or memorandum of occupancy or rent charge issued or employed by the operator or hosting platform to the tax imposed by this Local Law, the phrase "occupancy tax" will suffice.

Section 21. Penalties and Interest.

- a. Any person failing to file a return or to pay over any tax to the Comptroller within the time required by this Local Law shall be subject to a penalty of five percent of the amount of tax due, plus interest at the rate of one percent of such tax for each month of delay excepting the first month after such return was required to be filed or such tax became due.
- b. The Comptroller may, if satisfied that the delay was excusable, waive all or any part of a penalty imposed by this Section. The Comptroller may not waive interest accrued at the rate of six percent annually. Such penalties and interest shall be paid and disposed of in the same manner as other revenues from this Local Law. Unpaid penalties and interest may be enforced in the same manner as the tax imposed by this Local Law.
- c. Any operator, occupant, or hosting platform failing to file a return required by this Local Law, or filing or causing to be filed any return, certificate, affidavit, representation, information, testimony or statement required or authorized by this Local Law, which is willfully false shall be subject to a fine not to exceed ten thousand dollars. The individual who engages in such conduct while acting as the agent of such operator, occupant or hosting platform shall be guilty of a misdemeanor. The Comptroller may, in his discretion, refer such violations to the Erie County District Attorney.
- d. Any occupant, operator, or hosting platform who violates the provisions of this local law, in addition to any other penalties so specified by this Local Law, shall be subject to a fine not to exceed ten thousand dollars. Such violations include, but are not limited to:

1. Failing to file a bond required to be filed pursuant to Section 11 of this Local Law;
 2. Failing to file a registration certificate and such data in connection therewith as the Comptroller may by regulation or otherwise require;
 3. Failure to display or surrender the Certificate of Authority as required by this Local Law or assigning or transferring such Certificate of Authority;
 4. Failing to charge the tax imposed by this Local Law altogether or separately from the rent;
 5. Failing to keep the records required by Section 8 of this Local Law or otherwise required by the Comptroller by regulation.
- e. In addition to the penalties imposed by this Section and otherwise imposed elsewhere by this Local Law, entities in violation thereof shall be subject to daily fines not to exceed five hundred dollars per day for each day such entity remains in violation of this Local Law. Such penalties shall be collected in the same manner as otherwise prescribed elsewhere in this Local Law.
- f. The certificate of the Comptroller, to the effect that a tax has not been paid, that a return bond or registration certificate has not been filed or that information has not been supplied pursuant to the provisions of this Local Law, shall be presumptive evidence thereof.

Section 22. Returns to be Secret.

- a. Within 120 days of the effective date of this Local Law, the County shall establish a confidential mechanism permitting owners and operators to submit returns, pay amounts owed, and transmit all other information required by this Local Law in electronic form.
- b. Except as provided by a proper judicial order, or as otherwise provided by law, it shall be unlawful for the Comptroller or any officer or employee of the Office of Comptroller to divulge or make known in any manner the rents or other information relating to the business of a taxpayer contained in any return required under the Local Law. The officers charged with the custody of such returns shall not be required to produce any return required by this Local Law or evidence of any information contained in them in any action or proceeding in any court or administrative proceeding except on behalf of the Comptroller in an action or proceeding brought under the provisions of this Local Law when the returns or facts shown thereby are directly involved in such action or proceeding, in either of which events the court may require the production of, and may admit into evidence, so much of said returns or of the facts shown thereby, as are pertinent to the action or proceeding and no more.
- c. Nothing herein shall be construed to prohibit the following:

1. delivery to a taxpayer or a taxpayer's duly authorized representative of a certified copy of any return filed in connection with such taxpayer's obligation under this Local Law; or
 2. the publication of statistics so classified as to prevent the identification of particular returns and the items thereof;
 3. the inspection of the County Attorney or other legal representatives of the County of the return of any taxpayer who shall bring action to set aside or review the tax based thereon, or against whom an action or proceeding has been instituted for the collection of a tax or penalty; or
 4. confirming for any person or entity that a named operator does not have any undue outstanding tax liabilities, interest and/or penalties pursuant to this Local Law.
- d. Returns shall be preserved for five years and thereafter until the Comptroller permits them to be destroyed.
- e. Any violation of subdivision (b) of this Section shall be punishable by a fine not exceeding \$1,000. Any willful violation of subdivision (b) of this Section by an officer or employee of the County shall result in that officer or employee's immediate dismissal from office and prohibition from holding any public office for a period of five years thereafter.
- f. In the event that any person or operator fails to timely and accurately file a return and/or collect and remit the tax due and owing to the County, and/or fails to adhere to the terms and conditions of any agreement said party enters into with the County for the payment of taxes due hereunder, the restriction contained in subdivision (b) of this Section shall be lifted. Only authorized officers and employees of the Office of Comptroller, Division of Budget and Management, and Department of Law are permitted to release limited identifying information regarding the delinquency, including, but not limited to, an operator, person or taxpayer's name, names of the principals of said owner and/or operator, and the amount of the delinquency.

Section 23. Notices and Limitations of Time.

- a. Any notice authorized or required under the provisions of this local law may be given by sending the same by certified mail:
1. In the case of an operator or hosting platform, to the address provided on the last return filed pursuant to the provisions of this Local Law; or
 2. In the case of an occupant, to the address provided by such occupant on the most recent application made to the Comptroller pursuant to Section 11 or Section 13 of this Local Law.

- b. The mailing of such notice shall be presumptive evidence of receipt by the entity to which the notice is addressed. Any time period which is determined according to the notice provisions of this Local Law shall commence to run from the date of mailing of such notice.
- c. The provisions of the Civil Practice Law and Rules or any other law conflicting with Chapter 614 of the Laws of 1974 relative to limitations of time for the enforcement of a civil remedy shall not apply to any proceeding or action taken by the County to levy, appraise, assess, determine, or enforce the collection of any tax, interest, or penalty provided by this Local Law.
- d. Where an operator or hosting platform files a willfully false or fraudulent return with intent to evade the tax, no assessment of additional tax shall be made after the expiration of more than three years from the date of the filing of a return.
- e. Where no return has been filed by an operator or hosting platform as provided by Section 9 of this Local Law, the tax may be assessed at any time.
- f. Where, before the expiration of the period prescribed herein for the assessment of an additional tax, a taxpayer has consented in writing that such period be extended, the amount of such additional tax due may be determined at any time within such extended period. The period so extended may be further extended by subsequent consents in writing made before the expiration of the extended period. No extension authorized by this subsection shall, by itself or cumulatively, exceed two years past the original date of the return required by Section 9 of this Local Law.

Section 24. Effective Date.

This Local Law shall take effect upon filing with the New York Secretary of State and shall not be applied retroactively to the collection and remittance of taxes prior to the amendment to this local law taking effect.

Section 25. Completion of Unfinished Business.

Any matter undertaken or initiated and liabilities incurred under the provisions of the local laws repealed by Section 1 of this Local Law which are pending on the effective date of this Local Law shall be completed in the same manner and under the same terms and conditions and with the same effect as if conducted and completed in accordance with the provisions of the Local Laws herein repealed. Such matters include but are not limited to tax liability, interest and penalties previously incurred, warrants previously issued, and applications for refund previously made. Nothing in this Section shall be interpreted to exempt or excuse any operator or hosting platform from filing a certificate of registration with the Comptroller pursuant to Section 6(a) of this Local Law.

Section 26. Severability.

If any clause, sentence, paragraph, section, subsection, subdivision, or any part of this Local Law or the application therefore to any person, individual, corporation, firm, partnership, entity or

circumstance, shall be adjudged by any court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid or unconstitutional, such order of judgment shall not affect, impair, or invalidate the remainder thereof, but shall be confined in its operation to the clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section or part of this Local Law and its subsequent amendments or in its application to the person, individual, corporation, firm, partnership, entity, or circumstance directly involved in the controversy in which such judgment or order shall be rendered.

Sponsor:

Howard J. Johnson, Jr.