



Homeowners call on lawmakers to license inspectors

By Jean Mcmillan, Associated Press writer

BOSTON -- A proposal heard by lawmakers yesterday to license home inspectors would erect a barrier between inspectors and real estate agents.

But some inspectors said they had tested that wall and it wasn't sound.

"The fire wall doesn't go far enough," said Dennis Robitaille, president of the Able Home Inspection Inc. of Saugus.

"All these horror stories that we're hearing about bad home inspectors going out of business, starting up as new inspectors, wouldn't happen if they didn't have a middle person helping them out, which is the real estate agent," he said.

The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Cheryl Jacques, D-Needham, would require that real estate agents who choose to provide referrals offer homebuyers a list of at least 10 licensed home inspectors.

The list is aimed at combating the potential for a conflict of interest.

Problems arise, she said, because real estate agents, who most often work for the seller, may recommend home inspectors who go easy in pointing out problems. The inspectors feel pressure to give a favorable report so the real estate agent will recommend them in the future.

Robitaille said he would like the measure to ban any referrals to inspectors or advice from real estate agents. He said he has had inspection appointments canceled by buyers who have been discouraged from using him by real estate agents who don't appreciate his thorough review.

He said they might point out that he charges more, but not that he only does one inspection a day, not three or four as some people do.

But Edwin Shanahan, chief executive officer for the Greater Boston Real Estate Board, said he didn't believe the state should interfere in the relationship between real estate agents and buyers.

He said it is common for homebuyers to look to agents for referrals or advice on everything from where to get an inspector to finding a good plumber.

And, he said, it is not in the best interest of the real estate agent to have a poorly done inspection lead to dissatisfied customers.

"No one wants a deal to go more smoothly than a Realtor. However, no Realtor wants the deal to go through to the point where

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there are going to be lawsuits back and forth," Shanahan said.

While Shanahan said he did not favor Robitaille's proposal, he did support Jacques' bill.

The bill also would establish a Board of Registration for Home Inspectors within the Division of Registration and require home inspectors to carry insurance.

The measure stems from a report done by the Senate Post Audit and Oversight Committee, which Jacques chairs. The report, entitled "A Crack in the Foundation: Unlicensed Home Inspectors in Massachusetts," told of problems homebuyers have had with some home inspectors.

Among those at the Government Regulations Committee's hearing Tuesday was April Hoover of Milton.

Hoover said the inspector she hired on the advice of a family member had assured her that there were no major problems with the house she was buying in 1993. But within about a month, roof shingles were flying off and termites ate away her basement stairs.

She said she tried to take the inspector to court, but the case got dismissed by a judge. She said she represented herself because a lawyer would have cost thousands more.



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