

Editorial: Rental law is a reminder state politics can work

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Cynicism and realism often mean the same thing as applied to Alabama politics. Every once in a while, though, the system proves that it can work.

One such example is the landlord-tenant law slated to take effect Monday.

The law is balanced, practical and humane.

In a dramatic departure from much legislation that makes its way through Montgomery, the law is not a rubber stamp on special interests. Not that the economic elite didn't do its best; for years, "tenant rights" was a term that had meaning in almost every state but Alabama.

What made this law's path different was organization among those outside the corporate centers of power. Alabama Arise and Appleseed Alabama in particular worked tirelessly to make sure tenants were not -- literally -- left out in the cold.

Those organizations also went into the legislative process with a willingness to understand both sides of the issue. While some landlords have abused their unprotected tenants, other landlords have suffered abuse in the form of tenants with no intent to pay their rent. The previous law made the eviction process cumbersome and expensive, burdening landlords without corresponding benefits to responsible tenants.

In the midst of all this was the act's primary sponsor, state Rep. Jeffrey McLaughlin, D-Guntersville. He made his difficult effort to protect tenants seem easy when talking to The Daily last week: "Last time I counted, there are more tenants than landlords in this state." It was not easy, though. He succeeded in finding a balance.

Congratulations to Mr. McLaughlin, Arise, Appleseed and the landlord lobby, whose open-minded approach resulted in a law that helps both landlords and tenants. And who, in the process, reminded us that politics in Alabama can still be a force for good.