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Controversial foreclosure bill protest set for Tallahassee

By [SHANNON BEHNKEN](#) | The Tampa Tribune

Lawyers and consumer advocates plan a rally in Tallahassee Wednesday to protest a controversial bill that would speed up foreclosures in Florida.

The legislative bill would allow lenders to foreclose on homeowners without approval from a judge in as little as 90 days. It appears to have stalled, but the group says it wants to send a message to legislators.

"Do not take away valuable consumer protections," the lawyers said in a news release. "We want to work together to solve the current crisis."

One of the lawyers organizing the event is Matthew Weidner, of St. Petersburg. He says hundreds, possibly thousands, will attend.

"People feel insecure about their futures and finances," Weidner said. "This is an issue that touches everyone."

House Bill 1523 would allow lenders to skip legal proceedings unless the borrower requests the foreclosure go through the courts

Florida law requires a lender to file a foreclosure lawsuit and have the foreclosure granted from a judge. There are nearly 500,000 pending foreclosure cases in Florida, among the worst in the nation. Because of the backlog, foreclosures can take months or years.

Critics say the bill significantly shortens the foreclosure process, making it more difficult for troubled borrowers to save their houses. They say the bill wouldn't help the backlog of foreclosures because it applies only to new cases.

Supporters say it would take a burden away from judges and is good for neighbors weary of long-vacant houses in their community.

There are 30 states that have a nonjudicial foreclosure process, allowing some lenders to foreclose on properties in as little as a month.

Anthony DiMarco, executive vice president for governmental affairs for the Florida Bankers Association, said lenders hope the bill will eventually pass.

"We're disappointed that it may not pass this session," DiMarco said. "But we understand that we're making a major change to the law. What we're proposing won't solve everything, but we can't get the real estate market back on track until we deal with these foreclosures."

The rally is planned for 9 a.m. Wednesday on the steps of the state capitol. A bus will leave for Tallahassee at 3 a.m. Wednesday from 1 Corporate Center, near International Plaza in Tampa.