

To: Judiciary Committee, Connecticut General Assembly
From: David D. Biklen, Chair, Connecticut Commission on Uniform Legislation
Date: March 12, 2007

**Subject: Raised Senate Bill 594. AN ACT ADOPTING THE UNIFORM
REAL PROPERTY ELECTRONIC RECORDING ACT.**

Attached is a description of the Uniform Real Property Electronic Recording Act. The Connecticut Commission on Uniform Legislation supports enactment of this uniform act. If you have any questions please contact me at:

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Why States Should Adopt the...

Uniform Real Property Electronic Recording Act

As a result of the enactments of the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act (UETA) in most states, and the Global National Commerce Act (E-sign) at the federal level, it is now possible to have sale contracts, mortgage instruments, and promissory notes memorialized in electronic form with the electronic signatures of the parties involved in the transaction. However, real estate transactions require another step not addressed by UETA or E-sign. Real estate transaction documents must be recorded on public records in order to protect the current interest in the real estate and clarify who owns title to the property.

Real estate records establish a chain of title which is based upon the originality and authenticity of the paper documents presented for recording. There must be an orderly conversion of recording offices in the United States for implementation of an electronic recording system. The essential starting point for this monumental process is the Uniform Real Property Electronic Recording Act (URPERA), promulgated by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws in 2004.

Why should a state adopt URPERA?

URPERA does three simple things designed to have far-reaching effects:

Equates electronic documents and electronic signatures to original paper documents and manual signatures, so that any requirement for originality (paper document or manual signature) is satisfied by an electronic document and signature.

Establishes what standards a recording office must follow and what it must do to make electronic recording effective.

Establishes a board to set statewide standards and requires it to set uniform standards that must be implemented in every recording office.

URPERA modernizes real property law for the 21st Century. It is designed to help state administrative agencies meet the demands of the public for quick identification of title ownership. It should also streamline the real estate transaction at a benefit to consumers and every facet of the real estate industry. URPERA is an essential complement to those states that have already adopted UETA, acting as an extension of that law's effectiveness.

The basic goal of the Uniform Real Property Electronic Recording Act is to create legislation authorizing land records officials to begin accepting records in electronic form, storing electronic records, and setting up systems for searching for and retrieving these land records. The intent is only to authorize such activities, not to mandate them. It should be adopted in every state.

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SUMMARY

Uniform Real Property Electronic Recording Act

Electronic communications make it possible to conduct old transactions in new forms. Some of the oldest kinds of transactions governed by law are transactions in real estate: for example, sales, leases and mortgages. In the Middle Ages transactions in real estate were conducted symbolically, without paper or signatures. Most people were illiterate. Writing, printing and more universal literacy brought paper deeds, mortgages and leases, memorialized by words on paper with manual signatures. These were filed in public records to establish who had rightful title to any piece of land. Several centuries have gone by since that initial migration to the then new technology of paper documents and manual signatures. A new technology of computers, software to run them and electronic communications have come to replace paper. The law of real property must now make a transition to accommodate the new technology. The efficiency of real estate markets make this imminently necessary.

This long dependence on paper, however, casts up certain barriers to using electronic communications to carry on real estate transactions. The law of the states of the United States has many "statute of fraud" requirements that inhibit the use of electronic communications. Statute of fraud requirements put total and express reliance upon paper documents and manual signatures to make transactions enforceable. No paper, no enforcement. These same requirements have also made it more difficult to develop electronic analogues to transactions in paper that are equally enforceable.

The first step to remedy the problem took place in 1999 when the Uniform Law Commissioners promulgated the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act (UETA). This act adjusted statute of fraud provisions to include electronic "records" and "signatures" for the memorialization of all kinds of transactions, including basic transactions in real estate. It is possible to have sale contracts, mortgage instruments (in whatever form a jurisdiction uses) and promissory notes memorialized in electronic form with electronic signatures that will now be treated the equal of the same paper documents with manual signatures. This is the result of the wide-spread enactment of UETA and of the subsequent enactment of the Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act (E-Sign) by Congress.

Real estate transactions, however, require another step not addressed by either UETA or E-Sign. Real estate documents must be recorded on public records to be effective. Recording takes place in most states in a county office devoted to keeping these records. Recording protects current interests in real estate by clarifying who holds those interests. The chain of title leading to the current title-holder, meaning the historic record of documents relating to transactions for a specific piece of real estate, establishes the marketability of that piece of real estate by the current owner of interests in it. The real estate records establish this chain of title. State law governs these local recording offices, and there are requirements in the law of every state relating to the originality and authenticity of paper documents that are presented for recording. These are themselves "statute of fraud" provisions that must be specifically adjusted before electronic recording may take place. Neither UETA nor E-Sign help.

There must be an orderly conversion of every recording office in the United States for electronic recording to become accepted universally. That will be a complex process, but it needs a starting point in the law. The **Uniform Real Property Electronic Recording Act (URPERA)**, promulgated by the Uniform Law Commissioners in 2004, is that essential start.

The act does three fairly simple things that will have monumental effect. First, it establishes that any requirement for originality, for a paper document or for a writing manually signed before it may be recorded, is satisfied by an electronic document and signature. This is essentially an extension of the principles of UETA and E-Sign to the specific requirements for recording documents relating to real estate transactions in any state. Second, it establishes what standards a recording office must follow and what it must do to make electronic recording effective. For example, the office must comply with standards set by the board established in a state to set them. It must set up a system for searching and retrieving electronic documents. There are a minimum group of requirements established in URPERA. Third, URPERA

establishes the board that sets state-wide standards and requires it to set uniform standards that must be implemented in every recording office.

These may be simple steps in the law, but the entire process of implementing electronic recording of electronic real estate documents will be complex from state to state. Inserting URPERA in the law of a state requires careful scrutiny of its real estate law. If paper documents are effective, for example, when they are time-stamped when delivered to a recording office, when should electronic documents that may be delivered electronically when an office is closed be considered effective? Answers to questions like this one will take some work and some complex decisions as URPERA is considered for enactment in any state.

Notwithstanding this need for careful effort, it is important to make the start on electronic recording of real estate documents. Real estate transactions involve billions of dollars in the United States. The efficiency of real estate markets depends upon the adoption of technology to make them faster and more competitive. After UETA and E-Sign, the key is URPERA. Every state needs to consider it as soon as possible.

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