



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brad Hoylman-Sigal

Rally Against Tenant Displacement and Landlord Harassment

BRAD HOYLMAN-SIGAL September 15, 2014

| ISSUE: **HOUSING**



New York, NY – Residents of 222/224 West 21st Street held a rally to protest tenant displacement and landlord harassment on Sunday, September 14, 2014. Residents were joined by State Senator Brad Hoylman, Assembly Member Richard Gottfried, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, City Council Member Corey Johnson, neighbors and housing advocates, who demanded that the new building owner, Slate Property Group, remedy the multiple violations and unsafe living conditions in the building.

In March 2014, residents of 222/224 West 21st Street received eviction notices from MGT

Property Management informing them that they would “be required to vacate and surrender the premises on or before April 30, 2014.” By the end of March, Slate Property Group began gut renovating the apartments to build high-end rentals in place of subsidized housing.

The Division of Housing and Community Renewal ruled that the building was decontrolled because it was “substantially rehabilitated” after January 1, 1974. However, tenants who currently live in the building say they were never notified that their units were destabilized, as required by law, and their units should be returned to rent stabilized status.

Tenants who have remained in the building, many who have leases beyond the April 30 deadline to vacate, have been subjected to unsafe and excessive disruptive construction activities. On June 30th, 2014 the Department of Buildings issued a stop work order on all construction activity because of the illegal removal of firewalls in several apartment units. There have also been unpredictable cuts to gas, water, cable, and internet service. Tenants have also endured excessive debris from the construction and have reported holes in their walls and ceilings.

Cher Carden, a resident who has lived in the building since 1986 said, “I have lived in this apartment for 28 years. It’s more than a place to hang my hat; it is my home. I’m distraught that anyone would think of taking that away from me!”

“My apartment was illegally destabilized without my knowledge in 2005” said resident Andrew Rai, “Even when it was under rent stabilization my landlord did not inform me in my lease. We need stronger regulations to protect tenant’s apartments from being wrongfully destabilized.”

“I’ve called 224 West 21st Street home for over 15 years” said Steve Schaeffer. “So being told I

was to be thrown out in 30 days without so much as an introduction from the new landlords, was both shocking and destabilizing. They would not negotiate, and then started battering us few remaining tenants with overbearing construction, harassment and invasion of privacy. I no longer feel safe or secure in my apartment, feeling they will do anything to get me out."

Resident Jose Zarzal said, "I came home very late to find a strong noxious odor of gas in the apartment. Con Edison informed me to evacuate the unit and they would send someone right away. When the representative arrived he informed me that the gas had been shut off. The owners need to inform tenant's 24 hours before there is any sort of service interruption unless it is an emergency."

State Senator Brad Hoylman said, "I've personally inspected the premises of 222/224 West 21st Street and witnessed first-hand the deplorable conditions these tenants are experiencing because of the gut renovation of this building. These tenants are living in a construction zone and often don't have hot water or cooking gas. Enough is enough. The developer needs to address these serious issues of habitability immediately and stop trying to force the tenants out through legal gamesmanship."

"What's happening here is happening all over the city, and we've got to put a stop to it," said Assembly Member Richard Gottfried, who represents the tenants in the New York State Assembly. "Landlord harassment and illegal de-stabilization sound like jargon, but what they translate to is a wave of people losing their homes because a developer decides it's worth breaking the law to go from making a profit to making a huge profit. We need much steeper fines and stronger enforcement for harassment, and beefing up the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal so it can effectively fight the illegal deregulation that's decimating our city's affordable housing stock."

Borough President Gale Brewer said, “This harassment must stop. Tenants have rights, and I stand with aggrieved residents in protesting and speaking out against this outrageous attempt to put profits over people’s quality of life”

Council Member Corey Johnson said, “The treatment of tenants at 222/224 West 21st Street is completely unacceptable. Being served a 30-day notice without any explanation, followed by an onslaught of unapproved construction work leaving tenants without gas and water, holes in the walls and ceilings and debris and dust throughout the building is not how we do business on the West side. The harassment of tenants needs to stop, and needs to stop now.”

“The harassment that the tenants of 222/224 West 21st Street are facing is not uncommon on the West Side,” said Betsy Eichel, a tenant organizer with Housing Conversation Coordinators which is representing the tenants. “Fines and temporary stop-work orders are simply the cost of doing business for landlords who stand to profit from disruptive and dangerous renovations. Residents who have lived in the neighborhood for years--who have been instrumental in making the West Side a safe, vibrant place to live--are being pushed out simply because they are rent-regulated.”