



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael Gianaris

## Attorney General Protects Queens Tenants from Illegal Lockouts

MICHAEL GIANARIS December 13, 2022

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NEW YORK – New York Attorney General Letitia James today announced action to [stop Queens property manager BlueSky Management NY LLC \(BlueSky\) from threatening to lock tenants out of their homes in violation of New York’s housing laws](#). In June 2022, BlueSky purchased two adjoining buildings in Ridgewood, Queens, one of which was definitively rent stabilized, and immediately sent lease termination notices to tenants. They followed the notices with letters, emails, and text messages illegally threatening to lock the remaining tenants out of their apartments. As a result of the settlement announced today, all tenants who received these threats will receive \$1,000 in restitution, and additional apartments will be returned to rent stabilization.

“Protecting tenants from unscrupulous landlords must be a priority, and I am glad the Attorney General took this action to deter illegal lockouts,” said **State Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris**. “I applaud the work of local advocates including the Ridgewood Tenants Union who are fighting for residents every day.”

“My office stood up to BlueSky when tenants did not know where to turn, and we will continue to fight against bad faith attacks on affordable housing in New York City and across the state,” said **Attorney General James**. “BlueSky’s greedy and aggressive behavior left tenants frightened, confused, and unsure of their rights under the law. As New York City continues to battle this housing crisis, we must spare no effort in protecting tenants and defending affordable housing.”

“In Ridgewood, companies such as BlueSky are purchasing more and more rent-stabilized buildings with the purpose of de-regulating units and charging high market rents. BlueSky thought they could break the law in these Onderdonk Avenue buildings, but tenants acted quickly with the help of their local tenants’ union and the swift action of the Office of the Attorney General,” said **Gina Lee, coordinator, Ridgewood Tenants Union**. “We applaud the quick action taken by Attorney General James. When this matter was brought to the attention of her office, she ensured the rights of tenants were not violated by BlueSky. We know we can count on the Attorney General to protect the stock of rent stabilized units in a neighborhood like ours, where working class tenants are rapidly being priced out due to gentrification.”

In June 2022, BlueSky purchased 402 and 404 Onderdonk Avenue, two adjoining buildings in Queens. Shortly afterward, BlueSky sent termination notices to tenants, informing them that their tenancies were not covered by Rent Stabilization Laws. BlueSky represented that because 404 Onderdonk had undergone renovations to combine two units in 2012, the entire building was no longer rent stabilized, which was false. In early October 2022, the remaining tenants received letters, emails, and text messages threatening to lock them out of their apartments if they did not respond to management.

Ridgewood Tenants Union shared the communications with the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), and OAG immediately notified BlueSky that threatening to change tenants’ locks constitutes unlawful eviction and demanded they rescind the threats. BlueSky complied.

As part of the settlement, BlueSky will send an official letter to each tenant informing them that BlueSky is rescinding the termination notice, formally apologize to each tenant in writing, and pay \$1,000 to all tenants who were threatened with an illegal lockout. By December 31, 2022, BlueSky will also provide rent stabilized leases reflecting the proper regulated rent to tenants of

404 Onderdonk Avenue whose rent did not reach the high rent decontrol threshold. Within three months, BlueSky will hold a mandatory training for all employees that will cover illegal lockouts and unlawful evictions. The training will be led by a nonprofit organization.

This agreement is the latest in Attorney General James' efforts to protect tenants. Earlier this month, she [stopped real estate company Compass from denying housing to low-income New Yorkers](#). Last month, the Attorney General and the Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force [announced a settlement with Greg Fournier and his real estate company, Greenbrook Holdings, for harassing tenants and engaging in unlawful practices in managing its buildings in Brooklyn](#). In September 2022, Attorney General James [secured \\$4 million from landlords after uncovering an illegal kickback scheme to deregulate apartments, cracked down on tenant blacklisting, secured more than \\$400,000 for tenants harassed by Ink Property Group, along with up to \\$1.75 million for affordable housing and joined New York State Homes and Community Renewal \(HCR\) Commissioner RuthAnne Visnauskas in preserving an affordable housing cooperative development in Rockland County](#). In July 2022, she [recovered nearly \\$300,000 of illegally withheld security deposits for Brooklyn tenants](#). In June 2022, Attorney General James [delivered \\$50,000 to Community Action for Safe Apartments \(CASA\), a tenant organizing project, from law firm Kucker, Marino, Winiarsky & Bittens LLP after they unlawfully provided improper and damaging legal advice to New York tenants and shut down a landlord for exposing children to lead paint hazards in Syracuse](#). In April 2022, she [sued Brooklyn-based eviction lawyers for engaging in deceptive rent collection practices and initiating frivolous lawsuits against New York tenants](#).

“There is no right more fundamental than the right to have a home to call our own. That means there can be no relenting from our leaders when it comes to ensuring all our families have a roof over their heads,” said **Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr.** “On behalf of the entire Ridgewood community and all of Queens, I am deeply grateful to Attorney General James for her swift action, to the Ridgewood Tenants Union for their advocacy and to all who played a role in rightfully keeping these families in their homes.”

“In the wake of widespread housing instability and skyrocketing rents, it is egregious that property management corporations continue to perpetuate the housing crisis by attempting to push out the tenants of their recently purchased buildings,” said **State Senator Julia Salazar.** “We thank Attorney General James for her work in protecting Ridgewood residents from unlawful evictions and illegally raised rents. Tenants deserve security and stability in their own homes without fear of being locked out by management companies that prioritize profit over people.”

“When tenants know their rights and join forces to hold predatory landlords accountable for their illegal actions, everyone wins,” said **New York City Council Member Jennifer Gutierrez**. “I appreciate these efforts from Attorney General James and her staff for prioritizing tenant protection, and hope that other landlords see that they will be held to the same standards as everyone else in our justice system.”

This matter was handled by Housing Protection Unit Chief Brent Meltzer. The Housing Protection Unit is a part of the Division for Social Justice, which is led by Chief Deputy Attorney General Meghan Faux. The Division for Social Justice is overseen by First Deputy Attorney General Jennifer Levy.