

**NEW YORK, NY** (June 6, 2022) – Rent-stabilized tenants at 1833 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd. in Harlem announced a rent strike and new lawsuit today against their landlord, Manhattanville Holdings LLC, and property manager, David Israel, for failing to start repairs on their building following a deadly fire on November 18, 2021.

The fire claimed the lives of three tenants, displaced several families, and caused damage to apartments and common areas throughout the 46-unit building. Some tenants have been displaced for going on seven months and were forced to find new housing on their own, some staying in shelters temporarily. While the cause of the fire remains unknown, tenants point to conditions in the building that contributed to its spread and have rallied around a common goal – to get their landlord to repair damage in the building and bring their neighbors home. Tenants are being organized by Tenants & Neighbors and represented by Manhattan Legal Services’™ Tenant Rights Coalition.

See photos [here](#).

Read the complaint [here](#).

“The night of the fire, I told our building manager that I had nowhere to go and that I had just moved across the country. He said to talk with the American Red Cross,” said **Oaklin Davis, a displaced tenant and Board Secretary of the tenant association**. “I stayed one night in a hotel afforded to me by the Red Cross and then two weeks in a shelter with other displaced people until I found a more permanent place to live. No one from management ever reached out to me again, except on the first of each month when I find a rent demand letter stuck in the door frame of my unit that remains uninhabitable. The last note I received from management was a contract to renew my lease with a 1.5% increase in the monthly rate.”

Tenants met with the landlord, management, NYC Housing Preservation & Development, the Department of Buildings, and the Fire Department on February 28, 2022, in which the landlord committed to applying for city permits, making repairs, and establishing better communication with tenants in the immediate future.

However, months later, management has yet to begin construction and is ignoring tenants’™ repeated requests for an update, forcing tenants in ten units to continue being displaced at their own expense while also being expected to pay rent, and others in the building to continue to live amid dangerous fire damage and long-standing building conditions, including a broken elevator, water and fire damage throughout common areas and hallways, a leaking roof, broken windows and light fixtures, soot from the fire in the walls and ceilings, mold, and rodent infestations.

Tired of waiting for repairs, tenants organized, declared a rent strike, and today filed a lawsuit seeking a court order to force their landlord to make repairs.

“Our rent strike is a direct response to the questionable practices of this current management company, its predecessors, and the owner who continue to compromise tenant health and safety,” said **Sheena Morrison, Co-President of the tenant association**. “Despite numerous 311 complaints, many of us on the fifth floor have been engaged in an uphill battle to get management to address a longstanding mold issue in our individual apartments because the roof leaks whenever it rains. Just before the fire, it had become so unbearable that we had to move all of our clothing from the closet in the bedroom and begin sleeping in the living room. With the last few heavy rains the mold has grown exponentially and we have been forced to stay with family and friends. My next door neighbor’s™ ceiling continues to leak whenever it rains forcing her to catch the water with a bucket. The leak extends into the ceiling of the fifth floor hallways. The mold situation is compounded by a well documented failure of management to respond to repair requests and/or to perform repairs adequately. When I needed a new refrigerator, management sent me a roach infested replacement. I dragged it out to the hallway myself and asked the super to remove it. It took days before he came back with another one.”

Additionally, tenants allege in their complaint that the landlord’s™ long history of failing to comply with fire safety and housing maintenance regulations contributed to the spread and severity of the November 2021 fire, including defective fire doors, inoperable or missing smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in units and the hallway, defective or obstructed fire escapes, defective fire windows, combustible material stored by the gas meter, and lack of fire-retardant material throughout the entire building. Tenants allege fire alarms and/or smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in common areas of the building and individual apartments were not working and failed to alert residents to the presence of fire and smoke.

Tenants now await a court date.

“Now more than ever amid a continuing pandemic, these tenants deserve a safe and habitable place to call home,” said **Brittany Robinson, a tenant organizer at Tenants & Neighbors**. “Their landlord, however, refuses to provide the most basic of repairs, so now the tenants of 1833 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd. have made the courageous decision to oppose the system that actively works to displace families from their homes. These tenants have found strength in their community following a horrible tragedy and are doing what they must to bring their neighbors home during these uncertain times.”

“The tenants are tired of waiting for their landlord to do the right thing and make repairs, so today they are announcing a rent strike and filing a lawsuit against their landlord seeking a court order for repairs, relocation and storage costs for displaced tenants, as well as harassment damages, among other claims,” said **Rakhil Tilyayeva, a Staff Attorney at Manhattan Legal Services’™ Tenants’™ Rights Coalition**. “There are over a hundred HPD violations in the building, some of which have not been corrected since they were issued immediately following the fire, and others that have been open for years. Many of these violations relate to fire safety requirements, which we believe contributed to the deadly fire that occurred in November 2021. Tenants are legally entitled to withhold and set aside rent payments until repairs and essential services are provided. These tenants and their families deserve justice, and we will not stop fighting until we get it.”

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### **About Tenants & Neighbors**

Tenants & Neighbors is a grassroots membership organization working collaboratively with tenants to build and effectively wield power to preserve and protect affordable housing in New York State. Using tenant organizing as a strategy to build power, we work with tenant leaders across New York State to identify housing problems, develop solutions and devise tactics to effect long-term change in their housing conditions.

### **About Manhattan Legal Services’™ Tenant Rights Coalition**

Manhattan Legal Services’™ Tenant Rights Coalition, a program of Legal Services NYC, fights poverty and seeks racial, social, and economic justice for low-income New Yorkers. For 50 years, Manhattan Legal Services has challenged systemic injustice and helped clients meet basic needs for housing, access to high-quality education, health care, family stability, and income and economic security. Legal Services NYC is the largest civil legal services provider in the country, with neighborhood-based offices across all five boroughs helping more than 110,000 New Yorkers annually. The work of Manhattan Legal Services’™ Tenant Rights Coalition is funded by NYC Human Resources Administration’s™ Anti-Harassment and Tenant Protection program.