October 12, 2017, NEW YORK—Manhattan Legal Services, (a program of Legal Services NYC), the Metropolitan Council on Housing, and Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer want tenants in Inwood to know that landlords in their neighborhood are ramping up efforts to displace long-term residents by claiming, without evidence, that they don't live in their rent-stabilized apartments. Tenants experiencing this kind of harassment, particularly by landlords BSF Inwood (Barberry Rose) and Shaul Koplowitz can obtain free assistance from Manhattan Legal Services with support from the New York City Human Resources Administration’s (HRA) Anti-Harassment Tenant Protection program.

Press coverage: Manhattan Times

Barberry Rose and Koplowitz collectively own about 24 buildings in the Inwood neighborhood. In addition to the displacement practices typically seen in gentrifying areas, both Barberry Rose and Koplowitz have been engaging in a widespread strategy of initiating baseless non-primary resident holdover cases (claiming the tenants don't actually live in their apartments), or threatening to do so, in an effort to illegally evict tenants from their rent-stabilized homes. Most of these allegations are completely without merit, often targeting long-term residents who can prove beyond doubt that they live full-time in their apartments.

Shaul Koplowitz (#7 on the Public Advocate’s 2015 Worst Landlords list) purchased the first building in his Inwood portfolio in 2014, and since then has begun eviction proceedings against an alarming 53% of his tenants, including thirty holdovers.* Barberry Rose purchased its Inwood portfolio in December of last year, and has already begun proceedings against 25% of its tenants, including nine holdovers.* Meanwhile, Koplowitz’s buildings carry a total of 311 current HPD violations, with 62 classified as C, or immediately hazardous. Barberry Rose’s buildings carry 490 violations, including 55 immediately hazardous. Many of the tenants in these buildings are already represented by Manhattan Legal Services.

“[It] seems clear that this is a scare tactic to kick out long-term community members, specifically those who are low-income, elderly, and primarily Spanish speaking," said Karla Diaz, a paralegal at Manhattan Legal Services. “Some of the tenants have already reached out to us through word of mouth, but we want all of the tenants in these buildings to know that if they are experiencing this kind of harassment, there are resources and defenses available for them.”

“These allegations don’t make any sense. They accused me of living in New Jersey, having a car registered in New Jersey, voting in New Jersey, but none of it is true. I just don’t understand," said Barberry Rose tenant Juan Minaya, who moved into his apartment in 1983. “I have had to miss work over this case.”

“After living here for many years, people are being harassed to leave many of which are seniors like myself and that is not right," said tenant Marciano Perez, who has lived in one of Koplowitz’s buildings for 47 years. “The stress of being threatened with eviction based on allegations of non-primary residence gave me migraines and high blood pressure. This is my home. We as tenants must fight back so that they treat us better. We must keep fighting until all tenants are treated better.”

Inwood tenants are forming tenants associations and connecting to organizers and legal service providers to fight back against landlords who have new incentives to harass and evict them with the prospect of new development, said Nova Lucero, Community Organizer at the Metropolitan Council on Housing. “It is imperative that tenants talk to their neighbors and unite to win.”

The face of our city’s housing crisis, we need to marshal every bit of available talent and resources to protect affordable units and the families who depend on them, said Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer. Inwood, we’re pursuing that goal by working against meritless eviction proceedings and other tactics employed to scare tenants and remove units from rent stabilization. Together with our partners at Manhattan Legal Services and the Metropolitan Council on Housing, my office has knocked on doors and walked the streets of this specific set of buildings to alert residents that they have options and resources to fight back. We look forward to doing more, together, to block further harassment and displacement.

We will not tolerate landlords violating the law and harassing tenants to empty apartments to jack up rents, said Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks. HRA’s Office of Civil Justice funds and supports Manhattan Legal Services and other legal service providers to ensure that low income New Yorkers have a voice and cannot be threatened into relinquishing their rights.

Tenants who feel that they may have been targeted by Barberry Rose, Koplowitz, or any other landlord should contact a legal services provider to speak to an advocate. Legal Services NYC’s Citywide Legal Assistance Hotline is open Monday through Friday from 10am to 4pm at 917-661-4500, with assistance available in any language.

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