

QUEENS, NY (July 31, 2023) – Rent-stabilized tenants in three buildings owned by Zara Realty (140-60 Beech Avenue, 140-30 Ash Avenue, and 140-50 Ash Avenue) held a press conference in Queens yesterday to demand that Zara Realty stop tenant harassment, including asking for birth and marriage certificates, charging unnecessary fees for keys and move-ins, and trying to unlawfully raise rents by filing Major Capital Improvement (MCI) applications with the NYS Department of Homes and Community Renewal (DHCR), the state agency that oversees rent stabilized buildings in New York. Tenants called on DHCR to deny Zara's applications due to building disrepairs and apply the letter of the law which [prohibits MCIs](#) while certain violations exist. Zara, which manages more than [2,500 rent-stabilized apartments](#) across Queens, is notorious for deceptive rent practices and intimidation tactics and is being sued by the NYS Attorney General Letitia James. Tenants are being organized by CHHAYA CDC and Catholic Migration Services and represented by Queens Legal Services' Tenant Rights Coalition.

"Zara has been continuously harassing us since they bought the building in 2019—there is no peace," said Imran Patel, a tenant at 140-60 Beech Ave for 20 years. "When Zara changed the locks, they only gave us one key for our family of five. We still only have one key. We have leaks and mold in our bathroom; the electrical outlets are loose and often don't work. On top of all of this, Zara has started an eviction case against us for putting our AC unit in the window. We're in the middle of a heatwave here in NYC and they're threatening to kick us out of our home because we want to be able to live in this heat. They claim that we're violating the lease, but nothing in the lease says that we can't have an AC in the window. They gave us no warning—the super had even told me two years ago that it was fine, but two weeks ago we were given a notice that Zara wanted to evict us."

"And I'm not the only one," Patel continued. "They've started eviction cases against a few other families in the building for the same reason. I'll fight back and I know I will win, but I also know that for every tenant like me, there's another who would move out of fear because an eviction record can destroy your chance at finding a home."

"They wouldn't even give my brother a key, my brother who lives with me," said Maria Jenny Lopez, a tenant of 140-30 Ash Avenue. "He would be left out in the cold and rain if I didn't coordinate to let him in. It took me two years to finally get a key from Zara and I suffered a lot of harassment, including Zara employees on the fire escape taking pictures through my window. Other tenants are still waiting for a key and are forced to pay up to \$100. It's outrageous for such a simple yet important thing. They are also asking us for marriage or birth certificates. This isn't right. That is abuse. That is harassment."

"Zara has a long history of mismanagement and harassment in its buildings and this example here in Flushing is one the worst," said State Senator John Liu. "Using MCIs to improperly increase rents while buildings sit in rampant disrepair with outstanding violations is totally unacceptable. Enough is enough. We demand that this landlord get their act together and treat their tenants with the dignity and respect they deserve, and we call on DHCR to stop approving MCIs allowing the landlord to jack up rents and to audit all of Zara's MCIs."

"Tenant harassment is unacceptable and must not be tolerated," said U.S. Rep. Grace Meng (D-Queens). "No New Yorker deserves to be subjected to harassment, unfair treatment and adverse conditions by their landlord and that includes those who reside in apartments owned by Zara Realty. I stand with those who are speaking out and calling for an end to these unjust practices."

The NYS Attorney General Letitia James [sued Zara Realty](#) for similar harassment and practices back in 2019, including by asking tenants to sign improper leases, collecting broker's fees on rent stabilized apartments and overcharging security deposits that were three to four times one month's rent. The lawsuit alleges that some tenants paid more than \$11,000 just to move into a rent-stabilized apartment. Zara Realty was also accused of [harassing immigrant tenants](#) by allegedly posting signs advertising a federal immigration tip line and asking tenants about immigration status – tactics meant to scare tenants.

Tenants at the press conference were outraged by Zara Realty's blatant harassment, total disregard for their well-being, and attempts to raise their rents by filing multiple Major Capital Improvements (MCIs) applications with DHCR. Tenants urged DHCR to follow the law and deny these applications due to the rampant disrepair in their buildings, including lack of heat and hot water, roaches and mice infestation in the hallway and basement, leaking roofs, broken garage chutes, and security cameras they can't access. Repairs Zara has made, tenants said, were patch work jobs that quickly fall back into disrepair.

"We are sick and tired of Zara's harassment tactics and attempts to raise our rents," said Doug Ostling, a tenant organizer and resident of 140-50 Ash Avenue. "This is our home. This is our community. We pay our rent just like everyone else, but Zara continues to harass us and treat us like pawns in their money making schemes. They don't make basic repairs and then try to raise our rent? Enough is enough. We just want to live peacefully and in safe and livable homes!"

If approved, Zara Realty would be able to collect tens of millions of dollars from low-income tenants in these buildings over

the years while tenants foot the bill with rent increases up to \$300 while living in dangerous living conditions.

“Our demands are clear, audit all MCI in the Zara portfolio and pause all current MCI until this audit is complete,” said Rima Begum, Associate Director of Housing Stability program at CHHAYA CDC.

“Zara’s deceptive rent practices and intimidation have gone on for too long,” said Xiaowen Liang, an attorney at Queens Legal Services’ Tenant Rights Coalition helping the tenants. “It’s time for the NYS Department of Homes and Community Renewal to step up and apply the law fairly by denying these unlawful MCI applications. These tenants deserve better. They deserve dignity and respect and they deserve to live in safe and affordable homes. We won’t stop fighting until Zara is held accountable and puts an end to their exploitation of these tenants and their families.”

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