



January 28, 2016, BRONX, NY—The tenants of 1475 Sheridan Avenue, with support from **CASA**, **State Assemblymember Latoya Joyner** and attorneys from **Legal Services NYC-Bronx** and **The Legal Aid Society**, sued their landlord today in the Supreme Court of Bronx County on the grounds that he confiscated parts of their homes with disregard to any hardship or danger it would cause.

Press coverage: [DNAinfo.com](http://DNAinfo.com)

(Photo: Assemblymember Joyner with tenants and advocates)

The landlord, **Steven Finkelstein**, owns more than one hundred buildings in the Bronx. After acquiring buildings, he often claims Major Capital Improvements (MCIs) after ripping out the tenants'™ existing bathrooms and kitchens without prior approval from the tenants, with the intent to drive up the legal regulated rent.

1475 Sheridan Avenue, also known as the Beaconsfield, was a 100-unit pre-war building on the Grand Concourse in decent condition—but that didn't™ stop Finkelstein from gutting kitchens and bathrooms to inconvenience tenants and gouge rents.

“Steven Finkelstein knows that the only way they can hike up the rent as much as possible in our apartments is by performing major capital improvements and in so doing also attempt to deregulate our apartments. Not only that, we were also left without kitchens, bathrooms, and gas for months at a time! Finkelstein is asking for a \$79 major capital improvements per room,” declared tenant leader **Marco Angel**. “I have six rooms and would be required to pay a rent increase of \$474 if the major capital improvement rent increase were granted. This is insane! My father, sister, and aunt live in the building, and this would severely and negatively affect all of us if this went through.”

The complaint charges that Finkelstein performed this work in a reckless fashion, without regard to whether the work was needed, or would harm the tenants. He cut off cooking gas to the apartments for as much as eight months during renovations and forced tenants to give up their kitchens and bathrooms for months at a time. Tenants were forced to share a common bathroom in a vacant apartment on another floor. In this apartment, tenants regularly found trash including condoms and tobacco wrappers strewn throughout.

In exchange for this nightmare, Finkelstein is seeking to increase the rent by applying for an MCI order from the New York State Department of Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), in some cases nearly doubling the monthly rent. The complaint also charges tenant harassment, and that this work and the rent increase sought are in violation of the NYC Administrative Code and Rent Stabilization Law.

“Many of these residents are elderly and disabled, or have small children,” said **John Montoute, Staff Attorney at Legal Services NYC-Bronx**. “Not only have they been forced to live in a filthy and hazardous construction area for weeks and months at a time, now they are being told their rents are going up by hundreds of dollars. This isn't the first time this landlord

has tried to harass long-term tenants into leaving their apartments through illegal rent increases and overcharges, but the residents of 1475 Sheridan aren't going anywhere."

“Ahora, el tubo de calefacción que pusieron detrás de los gabinetes nuevos, la calefacción no sale. Se entra el frío por las ventanas. Tenemos que limpiar el baño y lo más que limpiar de la tubería debajo, sube un mal olor (Now, the heating pipe they installed behind the new cabinets, doesn't heat. The cold air comes through the windows. We clean our bathroom but the bad smell from the pipe still comes up), said **Luz Santana**, a longstanding tenant.

“We have been opposing the increase for the past year on the grounds that the work was poorly done,” said **Edmund Witter, Staff Attorney in The Legal Aid Society’s Bronx Neighborhood Office**. “Tenants regularly have leaks in their apartments that arose after the landlord supposedly fixed the plumbing and the “new” supplies are falling apart and poorly installed.”

"I am shocked and appalled by the complete disregard and unacceptable treatment tenants of 1475 Sheridan Avenue in The Bronx have received from their landlord, Steven Finkelstein. Denying access to essentials, such as a bathroom and kitchen, for over eight months is an unnecessary hardship and top concern of mine—especially when so many families are finding it difficult to make ends meet and keep a roof over their heads. Bronx families deserve more, and they deserve better as tenants of our great borough." said **Assemblywoman Latoya Joyner** (D-Bronx, 77th AD).

The plaintiffs seek a declaratory judgment that the defendants’ action are unlawful deceptive practices in violation of the General Business Law and that defendants have breached the warranty of habitability of the Real Property Law. The plaintiffs also seek a permanent injunction requiring defendants to cease unlawful, deceptive practices; to cease collecting or attempting to collect amounts in excess of legally collectible rent; and to cease engaging in harassment.

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Contact: Kate Whalen, 646-442-3654, [kwhalen \(at\) legalservicesnyc.org](mailto:kwhalen@legalservicesnyc.org)