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Super Axed For Refusing to Snoop Around Rent-Regulated Apartments: Lawsuit

By James Fanelli (/www.dnainfo.com/new-york/about-us/our-team/editorial-team/james-fanelli) | June 8, 2016 7:23am

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Jorge Perez, an Upper West Side super, said he was fired from his job because he refused a landlord's instructions to snoop around tenants' apartments to find evidence to evict them.

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Courtesy of Legal Aid Society

UPPER WEST SIDE — A super at a rent-regulated apartment building was fired for refusing the landlords' orders to “snoop” around tenants’ homes to find evidence to evict them, a new lawsuit charges. The DNAinfo archives brought to you by WNYC.
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Jorge Perez, 52, accuses his bosses at Pine Management — a company that owns at least 31 buildings in the city — of ordering him and other supers to search apartments for mail, prescription medicine and other materials that might prove tenants were illegally subletting rent-stabilized units.

When Perez said he wouldn’t snoop, his bosses axed him March 1 and are now trying to evict him from his apartment in one of their Upper West Side buildings.

Perez said he worked for Pine Management since 2001, first as a maintenance supervisor and later taking on superintendent duties at 510 Amsterdam Ave. in exchange for a rent-free basement apartment.

He said the requests for supers to snoop began in 2014, when brothers Daniel and Jason Rohlman took over Pine Management from their father, Thomas Rohlman.

“They just started having me do stuff that I found that was not right,” Perez recalled. “They were trying to find out if the tenant is actually living in that apartment.”

Daniel and Jason instructed the supers to delay repairs and perform shoddy fixes on rent-regulated tenants’ apartments, according to the lawsuit filed in Manhattan Civil Supreme Court on May 25.

The Rohlman brothers would also issue work orders that instructed supers to perform “snoop” tests on many rent-regulated apartments throughout their buildings, the lawsuit says.

“These ‘snoop’ tests would require that the superintendents unlawfully trespass into rent-regulated tenants’ apartments and mailboxes and take pictures of mail, prescriptions or any other evidence that would provide a basis for Pine Management to evict the tenants,” the lawsuit says.

The mail and other evidence could help prove that a tenant wasn’t really on the apartment lease, giving grounds for eviction, according to Perez's lawyer, Sumani Lanka of the Legal Aid Society.

“Pine Management’s owners are using illegal means to try to evict tenants from rent-regulated apartments in order to increase their rents,” Lanka said in a statement. “Their actions target a vulnerable population who depend on rent-regulated rents in order to maintain their housing. The Legal Aid Society, in bringing this lawsuit, is aiming to protect both our client, Jorge Perez, and low-income tenants in these rent-regulated apartments.”

The Rohlman brothers are also accused of instructing supers to cut the circuit breakers in buildings to kill the electricity to rent-regulated apartments, according to the lawsuit. Perez said the supers were to use the power outage as a ruse to enter the apartments to snoop for evidence.

Perez said he went along with the Rohlmans’ orders a couple times but, in February 2016, he refused to follow their instructions.

“I felt like this is something that we shouldn’t be doing. And when I told them I felt uncomfortable doing it, they fired me,” Perez said.

The lawsuit said that his termination letter said he was being fired for "not always sending pictures when work orders are completed." Perez said he never received a negative review while working for Pine Management and was rarely written up for complaints about his work performance.

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Pine Management did not respond to requests for comment. Iron-ton Realty, a company also controlled by the Rohlmans, is also named as a defendant in the lawsuit.

Perez's lawyer said Pine Management is currently trying to evict him in housing court. Lanka said she is trying to get a stay in that proceeding until the lawsuit can be litigated.

She also said that Perez has reported his accusations about Pine Management to the state Attorney General's office.



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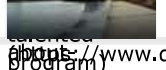
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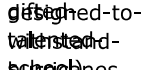
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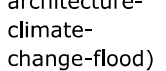
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