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Tenants rally against NYC landlord Samy Mahfar's harassment practices in December. Brandon Kielbasa of the Cooper Square Committees at center. Photo: boweryboogie.com

LOCAL

How Landlords Harass Old People

BY **STEVEN WISHNIA**
DECEMBER 16, 2014
ISSUE #202

Landlords trying to drive out rent-regulated tenants generally use the same harassment methods against the elderly as they do against younger residents. But people over 62 present both more profitable and more vulnerable targets. They are more likely to have been living in the same apartment for decades and thus have lower rent, and they are often poorer, sicker, physically weaker and may not speak English well.

"We've seen them taken to court more frequently in some cases too," says Brandon Kielbasa, an organizer with the Cooper Square Committee on the Lower East Side. The elderly "are also more fearful, in my experience," says Jenny Laurie, assistant director of Housing Court Answers.

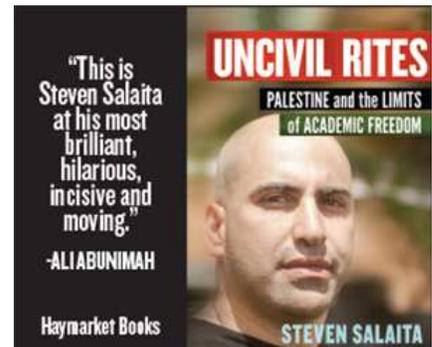
Harassment is built into a common real estate business model: Buy a rent-regulated building, especially in a gentrifying neighborhood; get the tenants out; renovate the units; and then rent them for much more than the previous tenants were paying. As rent-regulated tenants have the right to renew their leases automatically, getting them out requires pressure.

More than 200,000 of the city's rent-regulated apartments are occupied by people 65 or older, according to a 2011 study by New York University's Furman Center. This includes slightly more than one-sixth of the almost 1 million rent-stabilized apartments and almost all of the 38,000 still covered by rent control. In "core Manhattan," the area below East 96th and West 110th streets, where more than one-third of rent-stabilized tenants have lived in their apartments for more than 20 years, 22.4 percent of rent-stabilized tenants are elderly.

One tactic used specifically against older people, says Kielbasa, is "playing games with issuing their leases on time" to delay them getting into the city's Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption program, which covers rent increases charged to low-income people 62 or older.

Some common harassment tactics are:

- Giving everyone in the building notices that their leases won't be renewed. Though landlords can't legally do that to rent-regulated tenants, this can scare people who don't know their rights.



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- Offering to pay them to move, sometimes hiring “tenant relocation specialists” to couple buyout offers with threats of eviction.
- In buildings that are still predominantly occupied by rent-stabilized tenants, failing to make repairs or provide heat and hot water. In buildings with vacant apartments, not bothering to limit the noise, mess and damage to other apartments caused by renovation work.
- Trying to evict tenants on bogus charges, such as not paying rent even if they have paid, or claiming that their apartment is not their primary residence.

These tactics are used on all tenants, but can affect the elderly more acutely. It’s harder to go to court to defend yourself against a bogus lawsuit if you use a walker. At 143 Ludlow St. on the Lower East Side, the lack of heat in the building over the winter of 2012-13 caused older residents to repeatedly go to their doctors for more arthritis medication, says Kielbasa. Samy Mahfar, the landlord, hired the recently investigated “tenant relocater” Michele Pimienta to displace tenants from this building, he adds.

Earlier this year at 309 East 8th St. — a building owned by Steven Croman, one of the city’s most aggressive landlords — an elderly tenant had work done in her apartment that required her furniture to be moved. But after doing the work, Kielbasa says, “the crew failed to move it back and left the tenant with her bed blocking access to her bathroom for hours until a neighbor came home and helped her move it.”

In August, the state Tenant Protection Unit launched a probe into “abusive behavior” by Marolda Properties in Chinatown and the Lower East Side. The firm refused to renew the lease of a woman in her mid-80s on the grounds that she didn’t really live in her apartment, even though she’d dwelled there for more than 40 years.

The positive side, says Kielbasa, is that elderly tenants are frequently involved in organizing tenant associations in their buildings and are often the best-informed and most inspiring members. “In many cases, they have fought off displacement for decades,” he adds, “and have gained invaluable knowledge by doing so.”

The Metropolitan Council on Housing runs a tenant advice hotline 1:30–8pm Mondays and Wednesdays and 1:30–5pm Fridays. Call 212- 979-2011.

RELATED CONTENT

["Elderly Evictions: Assisted Living Residents Refuse to Make Way for Luxury Condos"](#)

By Alex Ellefson

COMMENT: HOW LANDLORDS HARASS OLD PEOPLE

reader - 12/20/2014 - 3:31pm

I feel the age group should start at 55 not at 62. as 55 and above usually is forced to be someone’s caretaker. Because they need to take care of family care. At 50-55 age group is where you start feeling a senior out there needs your care. affordable housing is no affordable housing. Bad landlord within nyc must stop. thanks for reading.

[REPLY](#)

COMMENT TO HOW LANDLORD HARASS OLD PEOPLE

Reader - 12/20/2014 - 7:38pm

I feel this article should have started with the age group of 50-55 and go up. This give a bigger pull out overview. I say 50-55 because many senior benefit start recognized as 55.

When you hit 50 I am sure you may be either stuck to become your parent or a family member or friend caretaker or know someone in need of help or have disability. Hitting a older folk to attack you is easy if you are a caretaker. Your caretaker will Work may end up you being picked by bad landlord and the next thing you know you , the disabled (your caretaker) their landlord all become As a victim of court eviction. Croman has done this Tatic many times. Lying. & lying thru court.

[REPLY](#)

COMMENT TO HOW LANDLORDS HARASS OLD PEOPLE

Reader - 12/21/2014 - 5:56am

Article: How Landlords Harass Old People

My comment.

Y

You only seem to care for rs apt. It would be nice in all future stories each time rent stabilized apt is mentioned rent control is also in the same victim category. Just because rc tenant don't come forward as much as rs people this does not mean they are to be left out.

Look @ steve croman he is famous for picking rc rs disabled and caretaker. He even picks building of other landlord and their tenant and us their business transaction and fake it claiming his tenant is illegally renting 2 apt. All you need is a tenant residing with another landlord and this person is senior ,disabled, non English spk, and is a Fay member or friend of a croman tenant or if the croman tenant is a caretaker to this tenant belonging to another landlord. Croman will make return comeback pushing eviction, harassment rc to both apt and yes he also accuse other building of conducting fraud illegal apt renting and hud fraud where actually that other landlord is not doing anything wrong These are rc apts. in the future if rs apt is being mentioned please include rent control. They are together. Thanks for reading

REPLY**STEVE CROMAN LEAVE US ALONE WE ARE NOT YOUR TENANT**

reader - 12/22/2014 - 6:15pm

I am a non English speaking disabled tenant of a government subsidy housing. My landlord is very nice to me. I have a caretaker who handles my need with the landlord for me. Unfortunately no matter how many times the court proof we are not doing anything illegal Steve Croman keep hiring new sets of reps and making return comeback attacking me and my landlord accusing my landlord is doing illegal apt renting and filing government fraud and doing illegal business activity. This has been over 15 years....My landlord cannot even do any normal business activity with me because he would use his 'tenant relocater' and take business activity of mine and turns it around and use his attorney and hello....I am back see you in court. This is just because my caretaker or the person I authorize my landlord to use to help me with my needs is a croman tenant. leave us alone.....stop harassing me and my landlord. They once helped you answer all your question and complaint and clear themselves from your lawyer and you trying to lie your way into court picking my apt to attempt evict your tenant. Now over 10 years later you again using new sets of reps making repeat comeback and reopen the case filing another frivolous lawsuit trying to get my landlord to believe your false claim? NO WAY!!!! my landlord protects their tenants and their contractor and all their side you cannot file false claim into court that their side is helping you testify what you filed into court is true. My landlord control my apt not you. You cannot just pick any building belonging to another landlord and start using it for yourself. This is criminal act, elderly abuse, harassment, etc....

REPLY**LET THE DEAD RIP**

Reader - 12/22/2014 - 8:20pm

This is a true story how a senior disabled non English victim ended up with. May this person rip and his new friends and neighbors in heaven helping him at his new home to win the court case that attacked his family after his departure from earth.

Mr. X died on date Y.

Immediate his caretaker landlord in less than a month after burial attacked his wife (another senior) picking his former home accusing his caretaker has two apt. I will call this landlord a.

Landlord a have a reputation as a eviction happy landlord filing frivolous lawsuit. x personal document like utility bill rent bill Rx bill etc is none of the business of landlord a.

Landlord a not only subpoena x's personal doc trying to evict x's caretaker they also accuse x landlord of fraud and going to the government to get funding. X is not the tenant of eviction landlord a. X's landlord also became a's victim being accusing of doing illegal apt renting. This is elderly abuse that x cannot see what his personal thing resulted to after he departed his friends and family.

REPLY**SHAME ON YOUR STEVE CROMAN AND ALL YOUR EMPLOYEE**

visitor - 12/25/2014 - 1:39pm

attacking the elderly, disabled whether they are tenants or not of yours and use them to evict your tenant. How we wish it will be the other way around maybe you becomes disabled and let harassment comes to you maybe you will learn a lesson out of it....and feel how it is like being bullied....

REPLY**STOP HARRASING US STEVE CROMAN**

stop harrasing... - 01/07/2015 - 8:38pm

Steve croman also uses specific harrasing strategies by hiring ex- NYPD officers to intimidate elderly tenants. One private Investigator he hired was Anthony Falconite. He would come to your door, and make believe he is a repair man, and try to get inside your building an take pictures. He has also threatened to evict us, unless we accept a buy out offer which was so low, that it was disgraceful. I tried writing a letter to Anthony falconite has his firm in staten Island. 88 hecker st, staten Island, Ny 10307 but no answer. Maybe we should visit or call hi minstead.

REPLY

SENIORS BEING HARRASED

chantelle - 07/03/2015 - 6:56pm

think that this is cruel and deplorable and I have the same problems here. YOUNG caretaker and older property management make for a miserable life for the seniors. its always something!

REPLY

YOUR NAME

SUBJECT

COMMENT *

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