

RENT (/RENT)

What renters can learn from the arrest of a terrible Manhattan landlord



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BY VIRGINIA K. SMITH

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One down, countless more to go: One of the city's most notorious landlords was indicted on charges that he has systematically harassed, threatened, and endangered the safety of rent-stabilized tenants in the 140 rental buildings he owns in Manhattan, as the *New York Daily News* reports.

(<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/manhattan/nyc-landlord-steve-croman-arrested-threatening-tenants-article-1.2629980>)

Steve Croman has been named in the past as one of New York's very worst landlords, (<http://www.villagevoice.com/news/the-ten-worst-new-york-city-landlords-of-2014-6716672>) and has an oft-reported history of using high-pressure tactics to force

stabilized tenants out of their leases, then flip the units for huge profits. (His equally charming son was also recently caught on video (http://gothamist.com/2016/03/28/landlord_son_video) going on a bigoted tirade against an Uber driver in Ann Arbor.) Now he's facing criminal charges connected to tax fraud, illegally jacking up stabilized rents, misrepresenting rental income to get lucrative refinancings, and more.

Croman is also reportedly set to be hit with a civil suit from the Attorney General's office for his systematic tenant harassment, per Gothamist, (http://gothamist.com/2016/05/09/steve_croman_arrest) tactics that purportedly include pressuring tenants into accepting lowball buyouts under harassment from a hired ex-NYPD henchman; conducting illegal and unsafe construction to pressure tenants to leave; and refusing to cash tenants' rent checks, then filing frivolous lawsuits against them for non-payment.

"My message to unscrupulous landlords is simple: If you put your own profits over your tenants' legal protections, we will investigate you and prosecute you to the fullest extent of the law," says Attorney General Eric Schneiderman in a statement. "My office will not tolerate anyone who attempts to line their own pockets by gaming the system. No one is above the law—no matter how rich or powerful."

Unfortunately, these tactics are all too familiar, if somewhat more extreme than usual. As we've written previously, (<http://www.brickunderground.com/blog/2015/10/rec>) always good to be on guard with aggressive landlords, and skeptical of information they feed you—the buyout price for giving up your place, for instance—and if they (or their representatives) bother you at home, it's well within your legal rights (and a smart tactic) to surreptitiously record them.

If they try to force you out by making conditions unlivable, filing an HP action for repairs (<http://cwtfhc.org/hp-actions-for-repairs-and-services/>) is your most effective course of action, and banding together with your neighbors to form a tenants' association (<http://www.brickunderground.com/blog/2015/07/ask> will ease the hassle (and expense) of legally fighting back. Unfortunately, sometimes it takes a village—and the judicial system—to push back against a bad landlord.

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