

NEWS

From Fighting Croman to Changing the Law — Lasher and Bragg Target Systemic Tenant Harassment



by Phil O'Brien
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Assemblymember Micah Lasher stood with Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg on Thursday morning to unveil new legislation targeting landlords who harass rent-regulated tenants across multiple buildings.



Assemblymember Micah Lasher and DA Alvin Bragg at the press conference today. Photo: Phil O'Brien

For Lasher, the issue is more than policy — it's rooted in his own early experiences renting in New York City. As a young tenant living with roommates on E18th Street between 1st and 2nd Avenues, he found himself battling Steve Croman, one of New York's most notorious and long-documented bad landlords.

Lasher told the story of an electrical fire that left their apartment unlivable — and a landlord who refused to return the security deposit. “My roommates and I took him to small claims court and won,” he said, “but even then, he wouldn't pay. We had to go to the bank to try to lien his accounts before he finally did.” Years later, when Lasher worked under Bragg in the Attorney General's office, he confronted that same landlord again — this time as part of the team helping prosecute Croman for more serious conduct. Those charges eventually sent Croman to jail.



New York landlord Steve Croman at some of the properties he used to own on W45th Street. Photo: Phil O'Brien

That personal arc shaped the legislation announced today. Bragg said it exposed a flaw in New York criminal law that has shielded some of the worst offenders — allowing landlords with widespread patterns of harassment to face no greater consequences than someone operating in a single building. Under current statutes, harassing two or more rent-regulated tenants in one building is a Class E felony. But if a landlord repeats the same behavior in building after building after building, prosecutors can't charge then with

anything more serious. “Scale becomes a shield,” Lasher said. “That’s the opposite of what good law should do.”

Bragg echoed that point, saying his office routinely sees the same troubling behavior — lack of heat, dangerous conditions, false filings, tenant pressure campaigns — replicated across multiple properties owned by the same landlord. “These are white-collar cases,” he said. “The intent is proven through emails, filings, leases, bank records and conduct over time. But when the conduct is spread across many buildings, our tools don’t always allow us to treat it as the systematic pattern it is. This bill begins to fix that.”

The proposal creates a new Class D felony, Aggravated Harassment of a Rent-Regulated Tenant, aimed specifically at landlords who engage in a “systematic ongoing course of conduct” across multiple properties or who have already been convicted once and repeat the behavior. Bragg said the higher exposure — up to seven years, compared to four on a Class E felony — gives prosecutors leverage to deter “sophisticated actors” who historically viewed penalties as manageable.

Senator Brian Kavanagh, who is carrying the bill in the Senate, described it as building on the 2019 tenant-protection reforms. “We’ve secured the right to peacefully enjoy your home,” he said. “Now we need prosecutors to have the right tools when bad actors try to push tenants out anyway.”



Manhattan DA Alvin Bragg, State Senator Brian Kavanagh and Assemblymember Micah Lasher at the press conference today. Photo: Phil O'Brien

For Hell's Kitchen readers, the subtext was unmistakable. Many of the most contentious housing battles in the neighborhood involve the very names raised during the press conference — including Croman, whose portfolio includes more than a dozen West Side buildings, and [Daniel Ohebshalom](#), who has faced long-running allegations from tenants on W46th Street. Bragg's office has indicted Ohebshalom and associated companies on charges connected to these properties; those charges are allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. Still, both Lasher and Bragg cited these cases as illustrations of the cross-building patterns that often slip through the cracks of current law.

Bragg said his Housing & Tenant Protection Unit — launched in 2022 — frequently fields dozens of complaints about the same landlord spread across multiple sites. "Civil and administrative processes get ignored," he said. "Tenants suffer the same harms again and again, but because they're in different buildings, the law doesn't treat it as one pattern. This bill helps us meet the scale of the problem."

Lasher closed by returning to the reason he introduced the bill in the first place. "This is about the right to stay in your home," he said. "It's about making sure no tenant gets pushed out because a landlord thinks the law

can't catch up with them.”

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And while Lasher and Bragg were outlining their push for tougher criminal penalties, the DA's office was already underscoring the point in real time. As the press conference was underway, prosecutors announced the indictment of Nicholas Fuelling, a California man accused of conning at least five would-be renters out of nearly \$20,000 by falsely advertising a Hell's Kitchen apartment this summer. According to the DA, each victim believed they had legitimately secured a room — or, in one case, the entire apartment — only to discover they'd all been promised the same space.

Bragg said the alleged scheme left one victim “effectively homeless”, and described rental fraud as another byproduct of New York's scarce housing supply. The charges against Fuelling — including multiple counts of grand larceny and a scheme to defraud — are allegations, and he is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

Bragg encouraged any tenant who believes they may be experiencing harassment or fraud to contact the Housing & Tenant Protection Unit at (212) 335-3300 or danyhousing@dany.nyc.gov. “Call us,” he said. “You don’t have to decide whether it’s civil, administrative, or criminal. We’ll figure that out — and if this bill becomes law, we’ll have even stronger tools to help.”



Katie Hamill

2 days ago

Oh hell, Micah, call me.
I’ve got a Manhattan Plaza harassment trilogy for you.

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