

CAN WE STOP LANDLORDS LIKE STEVE CROMAN?

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Landlord Steve Croman made headlines this week when the Attorney General filed a suit against him for tenant harassment, alongside criminal charges.. Croman is an example of “harassment as a business model” taken to its extreme, but the truth is that many landlords resort to harassment for the same reason he did – because once existing tenants are pushed out of their apartments, landlords can renovate, deregulate, and dramatically increase their profits.

New York City has an obligation to make sure that harassment doesn’t pay. A Certificate of No Harassment law would do just that.

The disturbing fact is that harassing tenants can be a smart business move. Croman is an exception – few landlords are pursued and charged as he has been; many calculate that the risk of breaking the law to harass out their tenants is worth the reward.

A Certificate of No Harassment law, which Council Member Brad Lander held a hearing on earlier this year, would prevent the issuance of renovation permits in buildings with a history of tenant harassment. It’s typically renovations that facilitate landlords bringing in new, higher-paying tenants. If harassing tenants meant they wouldn’t be able to get the permits they need to make those profits, the smart business calculation would change.

Steve Croman is a perfect example – he applied for and received approximately 325 alteration permits from the Department of buildings in the past 3 years. That’s in addition to any unpermitted construction work in his portfolio. Illegal and unsafe construction practices must be addressed – a package of legislation put forth by the Stand for Tenant Safety Coalition would put stronger measures in place to tighten DOB enforcement, and curb illegal construction that risks tenants’ health as well as their homes. But as long as landlords are able to continue getting permits to renovate apartments they’ve harassed tenants out of, the cycle of displacement will continue.

Pressure is rising on tenants in communities across the city. We desperately need more effective tools to keep tenants in their homes and communities. This is a tool the City can and should add to its arsenal as soon as possible – to stop the next Steve Croman in his tracks.

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