

NEW YORK

EXCLUSIVE: DHCR hid identities of landlords suspected of wrongdoing, court papers say

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DHCR "has no reasonable basis for denying the request," the Manhattan Supreme Court claim charges. (Mark Lennihan/ASSOCIATED PRESS)



A state agency dedicated to protecting affordable housing is wrongly shielding the identities of landlords accused of illegally deregulating rent-stabilized apartments, court papers claim.

Lawyers Robert Grimble and Shaina Weissman, who've represented tenants in rent disputes, filed a petition against the New York State Division of Homes and Community Renewal in early May over access to records on landlords suspected of wrongdoing, the Daily News has learned.



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Also joining the petition was Aaron Carr, head of the tenant advocacy organization Housing Rights Initiative.



The issue revolves around Community Renewal letters sent in 2016 to landlords who "unlawfully deregulated" rent-stabilized units, yet continued to reap tax benefits from the J-51 abatement program.



The program provides tax breaks to landlords who rehab their buildings — but mandates they maintain the rent-stabilized status of all units, according to Housing Rights Initiative.



The 2016 Community Renewal letters demanded that landlords follow the law and keep apartments rent-stabilized or risk losing the J-51 tax breaks, court papers claim.

But when Grimble and Weissman filed a public records request for the list of landlords who received the letters, Community Renewal refused, claiming that publicizing the names "would interfere with law enforcement."

The petition, which demands Community Renewal turn over the docs, contends that keeping the landlords' identities under wraps hurts tenants.



Community Renewal "has no reasonable basis for denying the request," the group charges in its Manhattan Supreme Court claim.



Housing Rights Initiative also maintains that Community Renewal routinely drops the ball in enforcing landlords' obligations under J-51.

"As a result, tens of thousands of units that were illegally removed from rent stabilization were never returned to the rent stabilization rolls, costing our communities precious affordability amid an affordable housing crisis," the group said in a statement.

"Rather than oblige landlords to re-stabilize illegally deregulated units and reset the rents to the correct amounts, the J-51 initiative merely sent them letters asking them to re-stabilize their apartments," Housing Rights Initiative also said. Community Renewal didn't comment.



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