



THE VILLAGER

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'He's still harassing us,' Croman tenants claim as landlord faces prison

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BY DENNIS LYNCH | Notorious Manhattan landlord Steven Croman is in both civil and criminal court for allegedly defrauding his lenders and strong-arming rent-stabilized tenants out of his buildings. But even though he's facing 25 years in prison, Croman hasn't eased off his tenants at all, some of them say.

"He's still not giving heat and hot water, still not backing off from the rotten things he would do, like jacking up rent and not returning leases to people," said Cynthia Chaffee, a longtime Croman residential tenant. "He's still doing it and nothing's changed. He's still using the courts to harass his tenants."

Chaffee has lived in a rent-stabilized apartment on E. 18th St. — in one of the 140 buildings Croman owns citywide — for almost 20 years, and runs the Stop Croman Coalition. The coalition is one of two groups that tenants formed to share information and resources about tenants' rights and how they can fight Croman's tactics.



Landlord Steven Croman — holding a folder to cover his handcuffs — being walked into Manhattan Supreme Court this past May to be arraigned on a slew of charges filed against him by Attorney General Eric Schneiderman. A detective is at left and Croman's attorney is at right. Villager file photo by Jefferson Siegel

Chaffee's neighbors at another Croman-owned building on E. 18th St. have gone without cooking gas since late April, which was only a couple weeks before New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman indicted Croman on 20 felony criminal charges and sued him in civil court. A resident claimed the building loses heat between 11 p.m. and 6:30 a.m., as well. Croman's company sent those tenants a letter in late November that claimed Con Edison required "invasive and onerous" work to restore the gas and was seeking a waiver "of these additional unduly burdensome requirements." The letter added that Croman's company asked Con Ed to turn on the gas as soon as possible.

A spokesperson for Croman's real estate company, 9300 Realty, said a cooking-gas leak at the building was repaired and was waiting for Con Ed to inspect the system and return service. The spokesperson added that the company was "working as quickly as possible to accommodate [Con Ed's] additional requests," there and at another one of Croman's buildings on W. 12th St. that has gone without cooking gas for much of the year, and that electric cooking plates were given to all residents at both buildings.

A resident at a Croman building on E. 58th St. said garbage collection is spotty, so rats have become a problem there. She has also lost utilities as recently as November.

"Is the harassment still going on? Absolutely," Viv Ramos said. "There was no heat on Thanksgiving and no running water the week of Thanksgiving. It's the same crap day after day after day."

A spokesperson for 9300 Realty disputed Ramos's claims of lackluster garbage service and loss of hot water at the building.

This week, tenants at the Croman-owned 159 Stanton St. filed a housing court action to get much-needed repairs made at the building, which have stalled in recent months. Shoddy repairs and deteriorating conditions there mean rainwater comes into the building through a roof door, causing ceiling plaster to fall into the hallways, they say.

There have been at least three burglaries in the building in recent months, and tenants said at least one was because a poorly secured window — which management was notified of — allowed a burglar to easily break in. Tenants will demonstrate in front of their building alongside tenants from Croman's other buildings and Councilmember Margaret Chin's chief of staff, Paul Leonard, on Thurs., Dec. 15, at 11 a.m.



Organized by local housing groups, tenants regularly rally outside the offices of landlord Steve Croman on Broadway near Houston St. in Noho. File photo

Some of Croman's commercial tenants have experienced issues as well. The embattled landlord is involved lawsuits with some of those tenants, including the family that owns the Caffè Vivaldi restaurant and live-music venue on Jones St. in Greenwich Village. Croman initially sued Ishrat Ansari for "failing" to pay rent on basement space the Croman would not allow the cafe to use. The landlord lost, but still refused Ansari access to the space and still charged him rent for it, forcing Ansari to build a storage space on the ground floor.

Ansari, in turn, took Croman to New York State Supreme Court in 2014. The cafe operator expected a ruling this fall, but Croman's indictment has put this case against him on hold. Croman is still charging Caffè Vivaldi for the inaccessible basement space, but the family has withheld rent since Ansari suffered a stroke earlier this year. That's left them wondering what will come next, a spokesman for the cafe said.

"We're not sure if there's going to be a further hearing or not," the spokesperson said. "We're kind of in limbo for now, which has been the case for a handful of years."

On Dec. 12, state Senator Brad Hoylman sent Croman a letter demanding that he "immediately cease all claims to basement rents and end [his] campaign of harassment through continued abuse of the court system in an attempt to evict Caffè Vivaldi."

In May, Attorney General Schneiderman indicted Croman on 20 felony criminal charges for allegedly submitting false mortgage documents to banks: Croman claimed many rent-stabilized units were market rate and also inflated the amount of rent he charged for commercial spaces to show greater rental income. He secured more than \$45 million in loans based on those false documents.

Schneiderman indicted Croman on a slew of charges, including seven counts of grand larceny and falsifying business records, plus one count to scheme to defraud, one count of criminal tax fraud and four counts of "offering a false instrument for filing," according to a press release. The A.G. also slapped the landlord's mortgage broker, Barry Swartz, on 15 charges.

Schneiderman separately sued Croman in civil court for allegedly "directing an illegal operation that wields harassment, coercion and fraud to force rent-regulated tenants out of their apartments" to convert them into high-profit market-rate units.

Croman was known to file unjustified lawsuits against his tenants to encourage them to give up their fights and vacate their apartments. Schneiderman accuses Croman’s employees of often writing up false documents claiming that his company never received rent from tenants, who he would then sue for the rent.

Croman also allegedly hired Anthony Falconite, a former New York Police Department officer, to intimidate tenants into packing their bags. According to the attorney general, Falconite would pose as a repairman or construction manager, gain access to apartments and then threaten tenants or take photos of their mail and belongings. He also reportedly followed some tenants to and from work. Schneiderman ordered Croman to “cease and desist” from having Falconite harass and intimidate tenants.



File photo

Schneiderman also accused Croman of performing hundreds of construction projects without permits, filing false documents with the Department of Buildings to avoid oversight, and violating lead laws, among other unsafe practices.

Hearings for both Croman’s civil and criminal cases will be held on Feb. 7. Some of his tenants and housing activists rallied outside New York County Criminal Court at the end of last month at a protest organized by the Stop Croman Coalition, Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES) and the Cooper Square Committee.

The message on the flier was direct and determined: “The Stop Croman Coalition and Croman tenants want to send a strong message to Steve Croman that we are here to stay and want him convicted.”



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 Reader · 3 hours ago

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Stop dragging the posting false and misleading information to reader..

Croman victim of attack is "not" rent stabilized tenants. It is any tenant of any type regulated whether it is his tenant or not.. victim have been rent control, rent stabilized, seniors, disabled, non English speaking, tenant and their landlord of building not owned or managed by Croman or 9300 realty. He have lawyers supporting these harassment to tenant. There are neighborhood private building owner whether they are private or government subsidy and not own or manage by Croman he sends in rep to harass them to talk their (can be their Croman tenant, caretaker or care attendance, or whatever) to accept buyout or see you in court. Croman lawyer comes in and give strong support in the lying into court. Rose & rose was one of these law firm along with heiberger & associates. There are more on the list but these two are example.

Reply

 Anon · 3 hours ago

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Another error and misleading subject in this article. Why so much errors to mis inform the public? Anthony falconite the former nypd cop.

Go to google and search him. He was also a former nypd, former fdny fireman, former fire Marshall. Why the fdny part is left out?

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