



General Eric Schneiderman announces a new legislation to protect tenants from harassment at La Marqueta in upper Manhattan, on April 12, 2017. (Yeong-Ung Yang)

NEWS

NYC tenant harassment legislation proposed by AG Schneiderman

By Alison Fox alison.fox@amny.com April 12, 2017

Attorney General Eric Schneiderman on Wednesday proposed legislation that would hold the city's landlords criminally accountable for tenant harassment.

The legislation would make changes to the current law, which Schneiderman said sets a very high bar to charge bad landlords, including making prosecutors prove the landlord was criminally reckless in causing a tenant's injury.

The new law, he said, would remove that high bar, and open the door to lawsuits over actions like turning off heat and hot water or exposing young children to lead dust. In the past 20 years, Schneiderman said, no landlord has been convicted of a crime of harassment of a rent-regulated tenant.

"This is something that's a tremendously important step," he said, speaking at La Marqueta in East Harlem. "Nothing gets people's attention like criminal prosecutions, I can say that from years of experience."

The new proposed law is in addition to a joint Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force, formed by Schneiderman, Gov. Andrew Cuomo, and Mayor Bill de Blasio.

"These initiatives will help to ensure that the people who are most in need do not fall prey to scrupulous landlords," said Melissa Mark-Viverito, speaker of the City Council.

Maria Torres-Springer, the commissioner of the city’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development, said the proposed legislation would be one more tool in going after bad landlords.

“And believe me, this is a fight that we fight every day ... and sends a very simple, but powerful message to renters across this city that we have your back,” Torres-Springer said. “And another incredible, powerful message to landlords of this city: that we will hold you accountable.”

Tenants who attended the event spoke of their ordeals. Lisa Mathis, 56, said she has lived in her Crown Heights building on and off for 40 years and is currently without hot water or cooking gas. Mathis’ 80-year-old aunt, she said, lives in the building as well.

“Unfortunately, my experience is not an uncommon one throughout our city. I have heard the same, if not worse, from numerous other tenants,” said Mathis, who works as a court clerk in Brooklyn.

“I think if this law was in place before, my landlord wouldn’t have gotten a way to get to this point,” she added. “I stay for my aunt because she’s on a fixed income, she can’t afford to move ... Eventually there will be no place for us to move to — we have to stand our ground to keep affordable housing in place.”



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said, and since then she has been living with a disability and uses a wheelchair.

“We have lived through everything ... chronic leaks, excessive dust, noise, debris, ceilings collapse, no electric for three months,” Chaffee said. “It’s long overdue, this new law ... It’s about time.”

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