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Tenants Relocated After City Declares Apartments at 159 Stanton St. Unsafe (Updated)



159 Stanton St.

The Department of Buildings issued a partial "vacate order" today for 159 Stanton St., a building owned by notorious landlord Steve Croman. Now the residents of two apartments are having to relocate until unsafe conditions in the tenement are rectified. The Red Cross was on the scene this morning to help tenants find temporary housing.

A notice pasted to the front door reads, "Do Not Enter... The Department of Buildings has determined that conditions in this premises are immediately perilous to life." [In the building's online file](#), a DOB inspector added, "Construction activity in third floor apartments has caused the ceilings in apartment 1 and 2 on (the) second floor to become dislodged and in danger of further collapse."



This past December, the tenants sued Croman in housing court, saying he was subjecting them to unsafe conditions and harassment. They were back in court for a hearing this past Thursday. We were alerted to today's developments by the Cooper Square Committee and City Council member Margaret Chin.

This afternoon we spoke with Francis Francis Di Donato, who has lived in the building for 25 years, and has now been forced from his home, at least temporarily. The Red Cross has found accommodations for him tonight at a YMCA facility on 47th Street, but he'll have to find longer-term housing after the weekend. "Croman follows the same script in all of his buildings," said Di Donato. "He makes everyone's lives so miserable that they want to give up." Di Donato has a 12-year-old son who goes to school in the neighborhood. He's obviously unhappy about having to uproot him.

Another tenant, who asked not to be identified, said she noticed cracks in the ceiling Thursday afternoon. The tenant was so concerned that she didn't stay in the apartment last night. In this week's hearing, the judge declined to take action that would have forced Croman to make immediate repairs. "I feel very resentful," said the tenant, "that the judge didn't listen on Thursday and there was no adequate tenant protection plan... I was left unprotected."

On the scene this afternoon was Sherief Gaber, an attorney with the Urban Justice Center. He's representing the tenants in housing court. He noted that DOB inspectors singled out Croman's construction crews for working without a permit and performing illegal electrical work. The inspectors observed sagging ceilings, which were being supported by a temporary joist. While a loose schedule was established for the repairs, the judge refused to issue an order which would have held Croman to a tighter timeline, said Gaber. As for the displaced tenants, Gaber asserted, "I believe the landlord should bear the cost of relocation."

Last May, Croman was arrested and charged in criminal court with multiple felonies, including grand larceny, criminal tax fraud and falsifying business records. He's being prosecuted by the State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, who is also suing Croman in civil court.

Just four days ago, local elected officials sent a letter to Croman about "deplorable housing conditions" at 159 Stanton St. They demanded that he, "address all repair and safety issues right away."

In a statement this afternoon, Chin said, "I am saddened and angered by the plight of these families who have been forced to vacate their homes today as a result of the irresponsible actions of their landlord. I am calling on that landlord, Steve Croman, to stop using construction to harass and victimize his hardworking tenants."

Assemblywoman Yuh-Line Niou added in a separate statement, "It is unacceptable and infuriating that Steve Croman continues to push tenants out of their homes here on the Lower East Side... The pattern of tenant harassment at 159 Stanton is clear, and we now have tenants being ordered to vacate their homes due to unsafe conditions."

We have contacted Croman's press representatives for comment. This story will be updated if and when they respond.

UPDATE 2/26: A spokesperson for Croman's company, 9300 Realty, responded with the following statement:

After we rejected a tenant-requested buyout of \$300,000 per apartment, these tenants chose to call the Department of Buildings and media to complain about repairs before calling the landlord. The Department of Buildings' inspection of the entire building on February 17th did not note any issues in these apartments and both tenants have blocked access both in and out of court to complete routine maintenance. If the tenants are genuinely motivated to get these repairs done and grant us access to these apartments, we are happy to assess and fix these issues as soon as possible.

Residents, in turn, came out with a statement of their own late last night:

Court-ordered repairs were made to these apartments in January and February, and we tenants welcomed them. Now we look forward to more repairs ordered by DOB being made so that we can return to our homes, and can live in a safe, secure, and structurally sound building. We have endured a well-documented rash of problems since Steve Croman bought the building. These problems are the reason for the HP action, including being one of the first instances of the use of the new city code for harassment of tenants. We tenants as a group made no solicitation of a buyout, and are unaware of any such attempt, so this allegation is a red herring meant to distract from the real issue of disregard for human safety in 9300 Realty buildings, including fire hazards and physical dangers like collapsing ceilings," said the 159 Stanton Street Tenants Association.