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NY officials announce task force to fight tenant harassment



New York state attorney general Eric Schneiderman. AP photo

Associated Press

State and city officials have launched a joint task force to crack down on New York landlords who harass tenants to force them into vacating rent-regulated apartments.

Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and Mayor Bill de Blasio were slated to announce the Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force on Thursday. They said the effort is in response to a rise in tenant complaints.

"As the real estate market in New York City heats up we have seen an influx of bad actors looking to turn a fast buck," Schneiderman said in a statement. "If you treat your tenants like criminals, we will not hesitate to make you one."

The task force will target landlords and management companies suspected of using disruptive and dangerous renovation and construction projects to force out tenants, officials said.

Once vacated, an owner can automatically increase rents by 20 percent or eventually convert rent-regulated buildings into luxury condominiums.

Traditionally, city departments have used their enforcement powers to ensure compliance with building codes if owners neglect their buildings, while the state handles harassment and rent regulation. The new task force will coordinate those prosecutions, officials said.

In a statement, de Blasio said the new task force will add muscle in the fight against tenant harassment and the city's efforts to protect rent-stabilized apartments.

"With the state and city combining efforts, we can prevent displacement and help tenants stay in their homes," de Blasio said