

# ‘The Bernie Madoff Of Landlords’: Man Accused Of Sending Former NYPD Officer To Threaten Tenants

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**NEW YORK (CBSNewYork)** — A man who owns more than 100 apartment buildings could soon be behind bars.

CBS2's Ali Bauman reported Steven Croman is facing 25 years in prison, as well as a lawsuit claiming he harassed tenants out of rent-controlled apartments.

“This guy was essentially the Bernie Madoff of landlords,” New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman said.

A civil lawsuit claimed Croman harassed hundreds of tenants, pressured them out of their apartments with aggressive buyouts, filed baseless lawsuits and even sent former NYPD Officer Anthony Falconite to scare rent regulated tenants out.

“For me, he said he was the building manager. He said he knew people in the police force he used to work with and he could have me handcuffed, but he didn't want to go in that direction,” tenant Silvana Jakich said.

The announcement came hours after Croman pled not guilty to 20 felony charges that include grand larceny and criminal tax fraud. Schneiderman said Croman submitted false mortgage documents to banks and inflated the rental income of his buildings, fraud that they allege got him \$45 million in loans.

“The charges in this case are defensible and Mr. Croman intends to address these issues in a responsible fashion,” Benjamin Brafman, Croman's attorney, said.

Croman owns more than 140 apartment buildings across Manhattan and Schneiderman said dozens of those buildings are filled with lead dust over the legal limit.

“It's filling the building every day, no matter how much we dust and vacuum. It's completely covered with dust,” tenant Robin Tzannes said.

Schneiderman said Croman defied orders from the Health Department to address lead hazards and directed his employees to ignore stop-work orders from the Buildings Department on unlawful construction.

“Inside his real estate empire we allege this kind of behavior was not only accepted, it was promoted, it was celebrated, it was a culture of corruption,” Schneiderman said.

Schneiderman said he wants restitution for both past and present tenants in an effort to send a message to landlords that harassment will not be tolerated.

Croman is expected to be released on \$500,000 cash bail.

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