



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

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**REMARKS OF DOI COMMISSIONER JOCELYN E. STRAUBER AT
PRESS CONFERENCE WITH MANHATTAN DISTRICT ATTORNEY TO ANNOUNCE INDICTMENT
INVOLVING HARASSMENT OF A RENT-REGULATED TENANT AND RELATED CHARGES**

Thank you, Alvin.

No one should have to live in the conditions that the defendant's tenants endured, as alleged in the Indictment.

The City has a range of options to address derelict landlords who violate the City's Building and Housing Maintenance Codes. But when landlords fail to remedy those violations, creating unlivable and dangerous conditions that persist despite the City's efforts, and especially where, as alleged here, there is evidence that a landlord's neglect is part of an intentional effort to push out rent-regulated tenants, we will not hesitate to pursue criminal charges. As the District Attorney explained, his Office's Housing & Tenant Protection Unit was created to target criminal harassment of tenants by unscrupulous landlords, filling a critical need in New York City, where a majority of the residents rent their homes, and approximately half of those live in rent-regulated apartments.

DOI is proud to be a partner in that effort.

This investigation developed, in part, from DOI's work in 2022 with the City Department of Housing Preservation and Development ("HPD") to conduct inspections of buildings and to ensure compliance with the City's self-closing door regulations, which help prevent fires and smoke from spreading. We began those inspections after a fatal fire in a high-rise building – Twin Parks North West – that failed to follow those regulations.

DOI and HPD focused inspections on buildings with extensive violations of the Housing Maintenance Code, which led investigators to the defendant's buildings. At some of those buildings, DOI observed conditions including rodent infestations, broken windows, and defective doors, leading HPD to issue various Code violations. Those conditions, as well as others including lack of heat and hot water in the winter, persistent leaks, and inadequate security leading to criminal activity in building common areas, are alleged in court documents filed today.

As is also alleged, the defendant sought to protect himself from the consequences of his misconduct by making false filings with HPD concerning the true ownership of his buildings. When landlords fail to provide true and accurate information about their properties, their actions hinder HPD's ability to protect tenants by promptly pursuing administrative remedies for housing code violations.

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It is important to note that prior to this indictment, HPD and the City brought many motions for contempt and civil penalties against this defendant and his properties for failure to comply with court orders to correct housing code violations. When the defendant persisted in his refusal to comply as to two of his properties on 170th street in Manhattan, HPD sought and obtained a warrant for his arrest for civil contempt of court, resulting in his incarceration.

In all of our investigations, and particularly where, as here, the investigation raises public safety concerns, DOI considers whether policy and procedure reforms are warranted.

To that end, DOI has issued several recommendations to HPD intended to strengthen its response to landlords who persistently neglect their properties. These include more frequent pursuit of court-ordered remedies, in particular contempt findings and arrests of landlords where warranted; more stringent registration and disclosure requirements to enable HPD to accurately identify building owners; and additional staff to handle all aspects of the inspection and violation process.

We have copies of the recommendations with us, which include more detail about our proposals, and will post them to our website today.

HPD is seriously considering these reforms and I thank them for their cooperation in this investigation.

I also want to thank Assistant District Attorney and Chief of the Housing and Tenant Protection Unit Chikelo Ibeabuchi and Manhattan DA Detective Investigator Samuel Morales and Senior Financial Investigator Lana Wong – who worked this case with DOI.

At DOI, I want to recognize the outstanding work of Special Investigator Emily Caswell, Deputy Inspector General Parvatee Persad-Tran and Inspector General Michael Morris.

Thank you.

An indictment is an accusation. Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country and New York City's corruption watchdog. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City. DOI's strategy attacks corruption comprehensively through systemic investigations that lead to high-impact arrests, preventive internal controls and operational reforms that improve the way the City runs.

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