



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

## Senator Klein Calls on New York City & State to Investigate Unscrupulous Bronx Landlords

JEFFREY D. KLEIN June 21, 2015

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*As rent law negotiations loom large, Klein calls for crooked landlords to be stripped of vacancy bonus*

*Hundreds of Bronx tenants forced out of rent-stabilized apartments while greedy landlords pad their pockets*

**BRONX, NY - Senator Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester)**, together with **Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj (D-Bronx)**, Director of Housing and Community Development at the Neighborhood Initiatives Development Corporation Hazel Miura, community activists and nearly 100 Bronx tenants, today called on New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, the Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force and the New York State Department of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) to investigate Bronx slumlords Martin Scharf and Phillip Goldfarb for the flagrant harassment and unlawful eviction of residents at 3555 Bruckner Boulevard and the Goldfarb Properties in The Bronx.

As rent law negotiations continue in Albany, Klein also called on the New York State legislature to enact sweeping reforms that strip bad actors of vacancy bonuses.

**Senator Klein said**, “No tenant should be the target of illegal discrimination or systematic harassment by dishonest, scamming landlords while trying to make a home for themselves

and their families. New York State law currently provides landlords with numerous incentives to evict tenants and raise rents. Let me be clear: this type of profit motive has no place in state law. That's why I'm calling on the New York State Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force to investigate and address all tenant harassment complaints at these properties. My proposal also seeks to strip abusive landlords of vacancy bonuses and any allowable rent increases. I look forward to working together with my colleagues in state government to strengthen and protect the rights of all tenants across New York."

**Assemblyman Gjonaj said,** "The tenants in these buildings have endured months of harassment, reduction of services and disruptions that have negatively impacted their lives. The property owners have shown absolutely no respect or consideration for the families that live in these buildings. I hold the property owners responsible for their actions and fight for the tenants that seek to live in a safe, comfortable and peaceful home."

Klein's call echoes the cry of hundreds of Bronx tenants who have been forced out of their homes by Goldfarb and Scharf. For more than a year, residents at the Goldfarb Properties have been the victim of persistent threats by management, dragged to court under false filings, received non-rent regulated lease renewals and had their rents both unfairly and substantially increased. Mr. Goldfarb has repeatedly endangered the health and welfare of tenants – cutting off all elevator access for elderly and disabled residents, removing security systems and pulling out gas lines in his buildings.

Similar transgressions have occurred at 3555 Bruckner Blvd., where Mr. Scharf and Abro Management have intimidated tenants, refused to make repairs to units, failed to properly credit rent reductions and served residents with false eviction notices. Several tenants received threats from management after reporting the lack of building maintenance to 311.

Currently, tenant harassment is prohibited under the Administrative Code of the City of New York and enforced by DHCR. With a clear lack of action exhibited by the oversight agency in recent months, coupled with the arrest of crooked Brooklyn landlord Daniel Melamed last week, Senator Klein is calling on the Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force to investigate and review all Goldfarb Properties and 3555 Bruckner Blvd. harassment claims filed within the last year.

Senator Klein is also urging the state legislature to strip predatory landlords of any incentives to evict rent-stabilized tenants, including:

- Eliminating the statutory vacancy bonus – an additional 20% rental increase landlords can levy on tenants every time an apartment turns over. Abusive landlords found guilty of tenant harassment in the previous calendar year would be prohibited from increasing rents on any apartment unit in the building where the incident of harassment took place.

In 2009, Senator Klein passed landmark legislation that provided New York State with the toughest tenant protection laws in the nation. Penalties for landlords found in violation of DHCR rules and regulations increased from \$250 to \$1,000 for the first offense, and \$1,000 to \$2,000 for the second offense. Fines were also strengthened for landlords found guilty of any form of tenant harassment – regardless of whether their actions were intended to drive tenants from their homes – from \$1,000 to \$2,000 for the first offense, and \$5,000 to \$10,000 for subsequent offenses.

**Hazel Miura, Director of Housing and Community Development at the Neighborhood Initiatives Development Corporation said,** “In order for communities to thrive, tenants need to feel secure in their homes without the threat of higher, unaffordable rents, eviction and harassment; they are entitled to live in a peaceful, habitable environment. When tenants can no longer afford to live in the communities they have planted roots in, not only do the tenants get

displaced, but the communities suffer – becoming un-stabilized, transient and no longer flourishing. We need to keep rents stabilized, we need to keep tenants and their families in their homes and we need to keep our communities healthy and strong.”

**Ian Davie, Deputy Director of Housing at Bronx Legal Services said,** “These tenants have become increasingly dismayed watching Goldfarb Properties ignore tenants’ rights on this scale. The improper rent deregulations, massive rent overcharges, targeted eviction of long-term tenants and denial of basic services are just a handful of the systemic tactics employed by Goldfarb Properties to harass tenants and remove these buildings from rent stabilization. Bronx Legal Services welcomes stronger rent laws and the assistance of the Attorney General in combating such disturbing trends.”

**Judith Bratnick, Tenant Leader at 2160-2166 Matthews Avenue said,** “I was lucky – I survived the elevator outage, where many tenants in my building, and other Goldfarb buildings in The Bronx, were imprisoned without being able to move out. This contributed to the deaths of at least three tenants and the hospitalizations of many others. Currently, at 1540 Pelham Parkway South there is no air conditioning and at 1135 Pelham Parkway North there is no garage space and no access for the disabled. This is wrong. I would not have survived these past months without true friendship and good neighbors. Thank you Senator Klein for stepping up to the plate and taking action to protect tenants across New York.”

**Andrew Goebel, Tenant Leader at 1135 Pelham Parkway North said,** “I decided to form a tenant association for the purpose of keeping myself and my tenants free from harassment by Goldfarb Properties. Unfortunately, Goldfarb prefers to run their property management company using intimidation, harassment and frivolous lawsuits filed against tenants with the hopes of evicting us from our rent-controlled apartments. When I met Senator Klein last year, and he listened to our complaints, a suggestion he made which we all pray for is the dismantling of Goldfarb Properties.”

**Sonja Melendez, Tenants' Association President at 3555 Bruckner Blvd. said,** "We need assistance in this building so that our homes are properly maintained. Management continues to harass us when we exercise our right to complain, even when we call 311. As president of the Tenants' Association I shouldn't be penalized for informing residents of their rights. Thank you Senator Klein for always supporting the residents of 3555 Bruckner Blvd., for consistently advocating for tenants' rights and saying 'enough is enough' when it comes to tenant harassment."