



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Kavanagh

D.A. BRAGG ANNOUNCES CREATION OF THE OFFICE'S FIRST HOUSING & TENANT PROTECTION UNIT

BRIAN KAVANAGH October 13, 2022

| ISSUE: **HOUSING & TENANT PROTECTIONS**



Manhattan District Attorney Alvin L. Bragg, Jr., today announced the creation of the Office's first-ever Housing & Tenant Protection Unit, which will target systemic criminal harassment of tenants and abuse of government programs by landlords and developers. Areas of focus will be harassment of rent-regulated tenants, deed fraud and defrauding of government subsidy programs by landlords and developers. This is the first time the Office will have a unit chief and cross-designated Assistant District Attorneys specifically assigned to housing matters.

“New York City is in the midst of a housing crisis, and that means tenants are particularly vulnerable to unscrupulous landlords,” said District Attorney Bragg. “By taking a targeted approach to complex and pervasive criminal activity, we can root out the bad actors who are seeking to game the system for profit at the expense of ordinary New Yorkers. The creation of this unit represents our firm commitment to fully utilizing the resources of our office to ensure Manhattan residents can exercise the right to live safely and securely.”

The Office also announced today that the Unit, which will sit within the Financial Frauds Bureau, will be led by Assistant District Attorney Chikaelo Ibeabuchi, who will oversee three cross-designated Assistant D.A.s who have a background in housing and real estate law, along with a dedicated Housing Coordinator. The Office has committed additional resources to expand the Unit as needed.

The Unit will focus on long-term investigations into systemic, structured and organized criminal activity among landlords and developers. The Office will refer complaints on other matters – such as individual disputes between landlords and tenants – to the appropriate agency, such as the Department of Buildings, Housing Preservation and Development and advocacy groups.

Tips and complaints can be submitted to the Unit’s hotline at 212-335-8900 or email Danyhousing@dany.nyc.gov. This Office is a safe place to report crime regardless of your immigration status.

“I commend District Attorney Bragg on this initiative to create the Housing and Tenant Protection Unit, a first-of-its-kind program created to address tenant abuse and harassment from landlords and developers,” said **Congressman Adriano Espaillat (NY-13)**. “Today’s

announcement reaffirms our commitment to combatting systemic mistreatment in housing, an issue that we must face head-on to address both its broad implications and role in racial inequity. This new office is notable and a tremendous step in our efforts to ensure equity as we move our city forward."

"It's no secret that tenants in low-income neighborhoods are the most susceptible to unprincipled tactics by self-serving landlords," said **State Senator Robert Jackson**. "I applaud the Manhattan District Attorney's Office for taking the initiative to create the Housing and Tenant Protection Unit, which will be empowered to investigate, audit, and bring legal action against those landlords who game unsuspecting tenants. As our city finds itself in the middle of a housing crisis, more than ever, tenants are vulnerable and in need of more protection. Today, DA Bragg is taking a definitive step towards defending a tenant's right to live without fear of being unlawfully evicted or harassed."

State Senator Brian Kavanagh, chair of the New York State Senate Housing Committee

said, "We've enacted some of the strongest and most comprehensive housing and tenant protections in the nation. These laws benefit countless New Yorkers—preserving housing stability and affordability, preventing evictions, banning harassment and other pernicious behavior, and securing access to housing without discrimination. But we know that our work is not complete and that even the best laws are not fully effective without proper enforcement. So I'm delighted that District Attorney Alvin Bragg is forming a new Housing and Tenant Protection Unit. By marshalling the resources, expertise, and investigative and enforcement powers of the DA's Office, I am confident that DA Bragg and his colleagues will make a huge difference in ensuring that renters' and homeowners' rights are respected and maximizing access to safe, stable housing. I am especially pleased that one of the focuses of this unit will be deed fraud, which the Senate Housing Committee will be examining in depth at a hearing later this month. I look forward to working with the new Housing and

Tenant Protection Unit.”

“Creation of an active, robust and resident-centered Tenant Protection Unit within the Manhattan District Attorney’s office is incredibly welcome news to the people of the 30th Senatorial District. Knowing that District Attorney Bragg will prioritize investigations into systemic criminal harassment of tenants and abuse of government programs by landlords and developers will help our residents sleep at night—knowing their residence is truly a home and that housing is an enforceable and inviolable human right! We have much more to do on the State level to provide truly affordable housing; however it is essential to know that D.A. Bragg has our back,” said **State Senator Cordell Cleare**.

“I am very pleased that DA Bragg is taking this proactive step to confront systemic tenant harassment, fraudulent rent increases, violations of housing subsidy programs, and other illegal behavior by some landlords,” said **State Senator Liz Krueger**. “My office regularly hears from tenants dealing with these issues, and they will take comfort in knowing that they have another ally fighting to protect their rights. I urge other district attorneys to establish similar units to investigate and prosecute systemic criminal violations of state and local housing laws.”

“Far too many working New Yorkers are left vulnerable to abuse from their landlords because they have nowhere else to go,” said **State Senator Brad Hoylman**. “We are facing an extreme affordable housing crisis, giving bad acting landlords an outsized opportunity to take advantage of tenants. I am delighted that D.A. Bragg is taking efforts to keep families in homes through the creation of the Housing and Tenant Protection Unit, which will focus on our most at risk tenants: those in government housing programs and rent-regulated units.”

“As our city continues to grapple with skyrocketing rent prices and a historic housing crisis,

it has never been more important to protect vulnerable New Yorkers from immoral and exploitative landlords,” said **Assemblymember Al Taylor**. “For far too long, bad actors have criminally harassed tenants and abused government programs at the expense of hardworking New York City residents. That's why I applaud New York District Attorney Bragg for responding to the urgency of the moment with the Manhattan D.A. Office's first ever Housing and Tenant Protection Unit. Housing is a human right, and New Yorkers deserve to feel safe and secure in their homes. Through this new unit, the Manhattan District Attorney's Office will have new tools to protect residents, target systemic issues, and ensure a safer and more equitable system for all.”

“The lack of safe and affordable housing underlies many of the social problems we see in New York City. When landlords and developers break the law, it worsens the housing crisis we face and endangers our communities. I applaud D.A. Bragg for recognizing the importance of investigating this type of crime and prosecuting those who harm tenants. I hope the creation of Housing and Tenant Protection Unit sends a strong message to unscrupulous landlords and developers: we are watching you and if you break the law you will be held accountable,” said **Assemblymember Harvey Epstein**.

“The creation of the Housing and Tenant Protection Unit within the DA’s office is long overdue,” said **Assemblymember Eddie Gibbs**. “I commend District Attorney Alvin Bragg for taking this step to hold abusive landlords accountable.”

“The creation of a Housing and Tenant Protection Unit within the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office sends a clear message that landlords who ignore their responsibilities under law and engage in tenant harassment will face consequences,” said **Assemblymember Dan Quart**. “With many New York families still recovering from the effects of the pandemic, I commend District Attorney Bragg for working to protect tenants and ensuring safer living

conditions for all.”

“I am immensely pleased by the DA’s announcement of the first Housing and Tenant Protection Unit,” said **Assemblymember Danny O'Donnell**. “As a former tenant attorney and representative of many constituents facing housing insecurity and illegal activity by their landlords, I know well the importance of robust investigation and legal enforcement for tenants’ rights. My sincere thanks go to D.A. Bragg for this crucial initiative.”

“New Yorkers are already facing record-high rates of housing insecurity, so landlords and developers harassing and scamming tenants is not just a crime, but also deeply immoral,” said **Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine**. “We can’t let this fraud and abuse go unchecked any longer, so I’m grateful to the District Attorney’s office for prioritizing enforcement and advocating for tenants.”

“The housing crisis in our city is apparent and pressing. For far too long, landlords have taken advantage of tenants despite pushes for tenant protections,” said **Council Member Carmen De La Rosa**. “Our city’s residents have been at the mercy of abusive landlords, especially at the height of a global pandemic, who have pushed them out to the streets and to our already overwhelmed shelter system, leaving them with little recourse. Thanks to District Attorney Alvin Bragg and his office, we can bring ample enforcement to tenant protections.”

“Too many tenants in our city are exploited by landlords and developers engaging in illegal activity,” said **Council Member Shaun Abreu**. “The creation of a Housing and Tenant Protection Unit sends a clear signal to those who break the law that there’s a new sheriff in town. As a tenant rights attorney and someone who has been evicted, I know that our city’s renters face many obstacles. Now, they’ll have a clear ally in law enforcement to help secure their rights.”

“Tens of thousands of New Yorkers will benefit from the creation of a Housing and Tenant Protection Unit within the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office. I commend the District Attorney for his commitment to protecting residents from unscrupulous landlords and displacement forces,” said **Council Member Gale A. Brewer**.

“It is vital that we hold landlords and developers accountable for their predatory, profit-driven behavior at the expense of the people we serve,” said **Council Member Kristin Richardson Jordan**. “I look forward to using this and any and all tools possible to promote accountability and prevent harm.”

“The launch of this unit couldn’t be coming at a more critical time. Though the COVID programs that supported so many tenants through the worst of the pandemic are ending, rent burden and harassment are not,” said **Council Member Christopher Marte**. “Landlords are so rarely brought to justice despite our office seeing their blatant disregard for the law, and they are exploiting the vulnerability of our constituents now more than ever. I commend District Attorney Bragg on this desperately needed unit, and look forward to seeing the results it is sure to bring.”

“As Manhattan navigates a particularly harsh housing market, too many New Yorkers face pervasive housing discrimination due to exploitative landlords and developers,” said **Council Member Keith Powers**. “I’m glad to see D.A. Bragg taking action by creating the Housing and Tenant Protection Unit, which will go after these bad actors and support everyday New Yorkers. Our city’s recovery is contingent on stable, safe housing for all—and this unit takes us that much closer to making that a reality.”

“Our clients and tenants across New York deserve meaningful protections against housing instability,” said **Magda Rosa-Rios, Citywide Director, Housing Justice Unit-Group Advocacy at**

The Legal Aid Society. “We commend District Attorney Bragg for standing with tenants in rent-regulated housing, and those who are victims of deed fraud and voucher fraud. We call on Albany lawmakers to pass the Good Cause eviction law to afford tenants in unregulated apartments with basic protections against exorbitant rent increases and unjust evictions.”

“The District Attorney’s first ever Housing and Tenant Protection Unit is a big step in the right direction to proactively and systematically uprooting unlawful real estate practices,” said **Aaron Carr, Founder and Executive Director of the housing watchdog group Housing Rights Initiative.** “For far too long, our government has turned a blind eye to the tenants of New York City. We applaud District Attorney Bragg for his tough-on-crime approach to real estate fraud.”

“NMIC is excited to work with the District Attorney’s new Housing & Tenant Protection Unit to hold corporate landlords accountable for harassing behavior aimed at pushing long-standing tenants out of their affordable apartments,” said **Rodrigo Sanchez-Camus, Director of Legal, Organizing, & Advocacy Services at the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation.** “Civil penalties that are unevenly imposed are simply not enough to deter this behavior that disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable tenants. We thank DA Bragg and his team for their commitment to ensure the health and safety of our community members and look forward to partnering in moving this important work forward.”

“HCC for decades has sought to empower tenants to combat systemic harassment by landlords - from organizing around failures to provide essential services to supporting tenant coalitions facing threats in their home. HCC is thrilled to see the creation of the tenant protection unit at the D.A.’s office and to work alongside it,” said **Leslie Thrope, Executive Director of Housing Conservation Coordinators.**

“P.A.’L.A.N.T.E. (People Against Landlord Abuse and Tenant Exploitation)

congratulates Manhattan District Attorney Alvin L. Bragg, Jr. on the new Housing and Tenant Protection Unit. Our team stands ready to collaborate with D.A. Bragg's Office to protect our City's most vulnerable and help end unfair landlord practices,” said **Elsia Vásquez, Founder and Executive Director of P.A.’L.A.N.T.E. Harlem.**