

February 17, 2017

Commissioner Mary Bassett
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
42-09 28th Street
Long Island City, NY 11101

Commissioner Maria Torres-Springer
New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development
100 Gold Street
New York NY, 10038

Dear Commissioners Bassett and Torres-Springer,

As the ranking member of the New York State Senate's Health Committee and an elected representative of the Northwest Bronx, I am writing to express my deep concern over the recent public health crisis in the Bronx that has resulted in the hospitalization of at least two people and the death of one after they contracted leptospirosis through exposure to rat urine.

As it has been widely reported, the rat population in New York City has been a constant problem that contributes to a variety of health conditions. Residential buildings are a safe haven for these disease-carrying animals if landlords fall short when it comes to addressing vermin infestations, garbage management, and repair needs that prevent rats from entering individual apartments. These issues are further exacerbated by a lack of enforcement of these regulations or coordination of services by our City agencies.

One of the individuals that was infected by this rare disease lived at 750 Grand Concourse in the Bronx, a building owned by Mr. Ved Parkash who has been repeatedly identified as one of the worst landlords in the city. As is the case with all buildings on this list, 750 Grand Concourse has numerous unaddressed housing violations that if remedied promptly could have curtailed the rat infestation.

The situation unfolding at this building exposes the pattern of neglect that my office and our community partners have been working against. I am tremendously concerned about the health implications for tenants in this building and others owned by Mr. Parkash. Therefore, I am requesting that both the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) work in collaboration to initiate a full investigation of all of Mr. Parkash's buildings and implement a comprehensive plan that both mitigates existing infestations and requires Mr. Parkash to set in place precautions to prevent future infestations from developing in buildings he owns. Coordination of the different methods, capacities, and specialties that each of these agencies have would

expedite the creation of a plan that includes identifying necessary infestation-related repairs. For example, DOHMH's rat experts can identify problem areas in buildings that HPD can issue a violation for and work to enforce, such as holes in apartment walls or recommendations to address poor trash management.

As I mentioned previously, it is important to remember that Mr. Parkash is not the only landlord with outstanding violations pertaining to vermin infestation. Many of the City's Worst Landlords have infestations in their buildings, like Mr. Parkash, who is also part of the city's Dirty Dozen. Furthermore, my office receives many complaints from constituents living in shelters overseen by the Department of Homeless Services of rat infestations and lackluster response. Therefore, I call on the DOHMH and HPD to implement a collaborative and proactive plan to address what have become chronic infestations in both shelters and the residential buildings identified on the City's Worst Landlords list.

Every New Yorker deserves to have a safe and healthy home environment. As a City, we need to ensure that basic health standard are upheld throughout our City's housing stock. It is critical that we take immediate action in buildings with known rat infestation problems to ensure that no one else is affected by this illness or at risk of death resulting from vermin-borne illness in their residence.

I look forward to reviewing your response.

Thank you for your consideration to this urgent matter.

Regards,



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