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MANHATTAN TENANTS FILE 3 MORE LAWSUITS AGAINST LANDLORD SAMY MAHFAR

*ELECTED OFFICIALS ACROSS MANHATTAN CONTINUE THE FIGHT AND
STAND WITH TENANTS AGAINST UNJUST PRACTICES*

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New York, NY – Today, tenants of four Samy Mahfar-owned Lower East Side buildings, 22 Spring, 102 Norfolk, 210 Rivington, and 113 Stanton, along with local elected officials and community groups, announced three more lawsuits against the landlord.

For years, tenants, advocates, and elected officials have alleged that Mahfar has been harassing rent stabilized residents in order to make room for higher paying renters by exposing them to hazardous health and safety threats, hiring a “tenant relocater” to manipulate them, and denying renters their rights to live in these buildings without fear of extreme tactics to remove them.

The lawsuit will call for an end to Mahfar’s harassment, for proper lead mitigation, and for Mahfar to respect rent stabilized tenants’ rights. The Stand for Tenant Safety Coalition is calling for Department of Buildings reform to better protect tenants during construction.

“For over a year, tenants at 102 Norfolk Street have endured intrusive, unsafe, and sometimes illegal renovation work at our building, in an attempt to intimidate and force out rent stabilized tenants in order to move in market rate tenants,” said the **102 Norfolk Tenants Association**. “These renovations have severely impacted our health and safety as well as disrupted our quality of life. In addition, SMA Equities have failed to provide basic services to rent stabilized tenants, including disabling the intercom for many tenants for over 8 months, which has largely prohibited City inspectors from being allowed in the building after complaints have been submitted. Lastly, SMA have failed in issuing lease renewals to rent stabilized tenants in a timely and accurate manner, in violation of State law. We believe all of this behavior is a form of harassment against rent stabilized tenants and we are seeking legal action to stop this mistreatment of rent-stabilized tenants at 102 Norfolk Street.”

“The tenants of 210 Rivington street have had their lives upended by the tactics of Samy Mahfar and SMA Equities,” said the **210 Rivington Tenants Association**. “We have experienced hazardous, unregulated construction that has caused our ceilings to collapse, our apartments to be filled with toxic lead dust, our heat and hot water to be out in the middle of the winter. They have attempted to expel people that have been here for decades

-- denying leases to many residents and leaving our questions about them unanswered for months.”

The local elected officials that took a stand with the tenants include Council Members Rosie Mendez and Margaret Chin, State Sen. Daniel Squadron, and Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer.

"Mr. Mahfar must end his campaign against these buildings' rent-stabilized tenants," said **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer**. "Every tenant has the right to a safe, clean home, free from harassment. We stand with the Mahfar Tenants Alliance and with all tenants fighting to keep their homes in the face of bullying and harassment."

"Harassment and intimidation of tenants is unacceptable in any case -- and it's especially destructive when the same landlord keeps being identified as a chronic problem," said **State Senator Daniel Squadron**. "Mahfar tenants have told my office that they are subjected to threats, lead dust exposure, non-renewal of rent-stabilized leases, and mismanaged construction. I stand with tenants, my colleagues, and all the advocates to ensure City and State agencies have the tools, focus and resources to protect these tenants."

"Mahfar is a bad actor and continues to do work without permits," said **Councilwoman Rosie Mendez, District 2**. "The tenants and residents of New York need real assistance dealing with bad actors before we have another tragedy like we recently had on 2nd avenue."

"There's a fundamental duality to the problems tenants are facing in Lower Manhattan and all across our city. Taking action to solve these problems means exposing and combatting landlords who flout the law, and it also means working toward DOB reform so our city can be more proactive and effective in stopping bad actors," said **Council Member Margaret Chin**. "I remain proud to join my elected colleagues and housing advocates in standing with the Mahfar Tenants Alliance, as we work together to fight for justice, fairness and safe living conditions for all tenants."

"Tenants at these three buildings have been forced to live under extremely unsafe and hazardous conditions (including exposure to toxic lead dust), denied lease renewals, and subjected to harassment by so-called "tenant relocators", said **Garrett Wright, Senior Staff Attorney at the Urban Justice Center's Community Development Project**. "Tenants believe that Mr. Mahfar is engaged in a campaign of deliberate harassment in order to force them to surrender their rent-stabilized apartments, permanently deregulate the units, and raise the rents to astronomically high market rates. We hope that this litigation will hold him accountable for all of his past behavior and ensure that these tactics do not continue in the future."

"For years, Samy Mahfar and SMA Equities have prioritized campaigns of intimidation and misinformation in an effort to drive rent-regulated tenants from their homes," said **Yonatan Tadele, Community Organizer, Cooper Square Committee**. "Residents of these three buildings have been under siege from aggressive tenant relocators, mismanaged renovations, and toxic lead dust exposure – the latter two causing repeat violations of NYC's Housing, Building, & Health Codes. We stand in support with the Mahfar Tenants Alliance and their decision to pursue legal action to protect their rights; their experiences

living through nightmare construction highlight the need for Dept. of Buildings reform as supported by the Stand for Tenant Safety (STS) Coalition."

"Landlords cannot be allowed to jeopardize the health of long-time tenants, including children and seniors, in their quest for higher rents," said **Mark Ladov, staff attorney in the Environmental Justice program of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**. "The reckless demolition in these buildings exposed tenants to lead levels thousands of times above the legal limit, and sent at least one child to the ER with asthma attacks. We need to stand for tenant safety by strengthening and enforcing the laws that protect New Yorkers' right to a healthy and affordable home."

"SMA's behavior are typical of predatory equity landlords, who drive out rent-stabilized tenants to make a quick profit at the expense of their tenants' livelihoods," said **Wai Yee Poon, Chinatown Tenants Union Organizer at CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities**. Non-renewal of leases, door-to-door intimidation, threats, buyout offers, not following lead mitigation procedures, and questionable construction work are only terse descriptions of what the tenants actually have gone through. The organizing efforts of the Mahfar Tenants Alliance demonstrate how the low-income, immigrant communities of Lower East Side and Chinatown are fighting back against predatory equity and demanding housing justice,"

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ABOUT THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT AT THE URBAN JUSTICE CENTER

The Community Development Project (CDP) at the Urban Justice Center strengthens the impact of grassroots organizations in New York City's low-income and other excluded communities. CDP partners with community organizations to win legal cases, publish community-driven research reports, assist with the formation of new organizations and cooperatives, and provide technical assistance in support of their work towards social justice.

ABOUT THE COOPER SQUARE COMMITTEE

The Cooper Square Committee (CSC) works with area residents to contribute to the preservation and development of affordable, environmentally healthy housing and community/cultural spaces so that the Cooper Square area remains racially, economically, and culturally diverse. CSC has spearheaded significant neighborhood victories in our history, comprising over 50 years of tenant organizing, community-based planning, advocacy and development. CSC relies on the active involvement of their members in the organization's work to advance their affordable housing agenda.

ABOUT CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities

CAA AV works to build grassroots community power across diverse poor and working class Asian immigrant and refugee communities in New York City. Through an organizing model constituted by five core elements- basebuilding, leadership development, campaigns, alliances, and organizational development- CAA AV organizes communities to fight for institutional change and participates in a broader movement towards racial, gender, and economic justice.

ABOUT NYPLI

New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) advances equality and civil rights, with a focus on health justice, disability rights and environmental justice, through the power of community lawyering and partnerships with the private bar. Through community lawyering, NYLPI puts its legal, policy and community organizing expertise at the service of New York City communities and individuals. NYLPI's partnership with the private bar strengthens its advocacy and connects community groups and nonprofits with critical legal assistance. NYLPI is the recipient of the 2010 New York Times Awards for Nonprofit Excellence.