

For Immediate Release

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336 W. 17th Street Tenants Launch Rent Strike: We Will Not Stand for Construction as Harassment or Lead Contamination in Our Homes!

*Tenants Unveil Massive “RENT STRIKE” Banner, Demand Justice for
Months Spent Living Under Intense Construction & End to Unresponsive
Management*

New York, NY -- Tenants from 336 W. 17th Street held a rally and press conference on the morning of July 23rd, 2019, and unfurled a massive banner in protest of the construction as harassment that they feel they have been subjected to since **NYC Management**, property and asset management firm operated by the **Besen Group**, began performing gut renovations in their building last year. Tenants were joined by the **Cooper Square Committee** and **Lead Dust Free NYC Coalition**, as well as New York State **Senator Brad Hoylman**, New York State **Assemblymember Richard Gottfried** and representatives from the offices of **City Council Speaker Corey Johnson** and **Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer** while they described the conditions they have lived through. Members of the tenants' association recounted collapsed ceilings which injured tenants, clouds of dust and debris circulating throughout the building, security concerns which have resulted in theft of tenants' personal items, and unresponsive management.

The 336 W. 17th Street Tenants' Association, with the help of **TakeRoot Justice**, have taken affirmative litigation against NYC Management to put an end to the Besen Group subsidiary's alleged reckless construction practices as they gut renovate empty apartment units in the building. On April 11th, 2019, tenants received notice from New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene that lead dust levels above the legal limit were found in 7 of the 10 samples collected on floors, treads, and landings in the building. The highest sample showed lead levels at nearly 8x the legal threshold.

Last year, the New York state Attorney General's office selected New York City Management to operate notorious landlord **Steven Croman**'s portfolio of more than 100 buildings as of July 1, 2018, according to the Commercial Observer. NYC Management will run the properties for five years.

“At the end of January 2019 our living room ceiling collapsed while my husband was working at his desk, unfortunately directly under the collapsed ceiling,” said **Kiyoko Horvath, a tenant at 336 W. 17th Street**. “He was covered with dust, and was injured by falling debris. He was diagnosed with a traumatic head injury by his neurologist, and continues to suffer from headaches, vertigo and numbness. We told workers to stop working and called Management, but there was no response.”

“[When construction began] every part of the building and all apartments were constantly filled with heavy dust and debris – which subsequent testing has proven to have contained toxic levels of lead dust and mold. I began having regular health issues with eye styes and upper respiratory infections, which caused

me to miss a great deal of work and exacerbated other existing health problems,” Said **John Martin-Roseberry, a tenant at 336 W. 17th Street.**

“If a gang of street thugs was openly assaulting people day after day, endangering their lives, we’d want them arrested and put behind bars,” said **Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried.** “That’s what this landlord and management company are doing. The fact that they wear suits, sit in an office, and pay a gang to do the dirty work for them, and are doing it so they can make a fortune, makes it even more outrageous.”

“The degrading conditions of our building lead to a rat infestation. The basement, unoccupied, became host to rodents,” said **Calder Singer, a tenant at 336 W. 17th Street.** “At one point the building’s porter laid rat poison in the basement; the following day he brought up two garbage bags full of dead rodents. I’ve shot footage of rats frolicking in the air shafts. While it is a condition that has since diminished, for months it was our day to day. The air shafts, however, remain uncleaned. It was filled with detritus before I moved in; I can still identify particular pieces of debris from 3 years ago.”

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ABOUT THE LEAD DUST FREE NYC (LDFNYC) COALITION

LDFNYC is a coalition of tenants who have been exposed to lead dust and are focused on organizing to end lead poisoning in NYC. We are calling for stronger enforcement of NYC's lead laws, as well as new legislation to protect tenants from toxic lead dust exposure.

ABOUT THE COOPER SQUARE COMMITTEE

The Cooper Square Committee (CSC) works with area tenants 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. The Cooper Square Committee has spearheaded significant neighborhood victories in our history, comprising 50 years of tenant organizing, community-based planning, advocacy and development. We rely on the active involvement of our members in the organization's work to advance our affordable housing agenda.

ABOUT TAKEROOT JUSTICE

TakeRoot Justice provides legal, participatory research and policy support to strengthen the work of grassroots and community-based groups in New York City to dismantle racial, economic and social oppression.



