

Want Unlimited Digital Access to NY Daily News? Try 13 WEEKS FOR ONLY 99¢

EXCLUSIVE: Attorney General goes after ex-cop accused of harassing tenants in rent-stabilized apartments

BY GREG B. SMITH

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS Friday, July 25, 2014, 2:30 AM

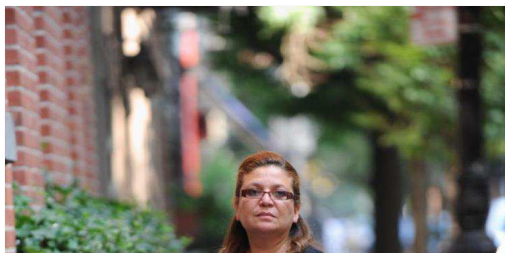


Anthony Falconite has been hit with a 'cease and desist' order claiming he regularly harasses tenants in rent-stabilized apartments and threatens them with eviction so landlords can charge higher rent when they leave. (KEN MURRAY/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

He's a renter's worst nightmare — an ex-cop authorities say regularly harasses and intimidates rent-stabilized tenants to force them out so their landlord can charge higher rent. His name is Anthony Falconite, and this week state Attorney General Eric Schneiderman took the unusual step of slapping him with a "cease and desist" order, demanding he halt an increasingly aggressive campaign that's crossed the legal line.

In documents obtained by the Daily News, Schneiderman charges that Falconite has forced his way into apartments, snapped photos of tenants' mail and belongings and repeatedly threatened them with eviction.

Tenants say he's followed them to and from work, confronting them at their jobs about where they really live. He has questioned family members and even tenants' children. He's pretended to be a maintenance worker or a FedEx agent to get inside their apartments.



Once in, he has rifled through drawers, taken photos of prescription medication and demanded Social Security numbers — all in a hard-core effort to terrorize tenants into accepting paltry buyouts or discover whether they have another address.

Rent-stabilized apartments must be a tenant's primary residence. If Falconite can prove a tenant lives elsewhere, the resident could be subject to eviction, freeing up a unit so the landlord can offer it at market rent.



Nelida Godfrey alleges her landlord hired the former cop to harass her into taking a 'buyout' and moving out of her Greenwich Village apartment and restaurant that she owns. (SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)



PAID CONTENT BY [GLASSESUSA.COM](https://www.glassesusa.com)

Glasses-Wearers Are Going Crazy Over

The cease-and-desist order served Wednesday demands that he stop this campaign of intimidation or face civil fines.

Kristen Clarke, chief of the AG's civil rights bureau, alleges that Falconite "engaged in a pattern of unlawful intimidation, deception and harassing conduct," the order states.

Outside his Staten Island home Wednesday night, Falconite, 44, declined to answer questions, stating, "There's nothing I'm charged with. I'm an ex-cop. I'm a hardworking guy. Don't knock on my door, I have two kids."

The order says the AG has "received and carefully reviewed numerous complaints about (Falconite's) work on behalf of landlords — including Steven Croman — who owns and operates rent-regulated housing in Manhattan."



Falconite has twice tried to force his way into her apartment, Godfrey says. (SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

Croman, 47, a multimillionaire Manhattan socialite, has said he owns more than 100 buildings in Manhattan. He's been repeatedly accused by tenants of using high-pressure tactics to force them to leave so he can convert apartments to market rates.

They say he regularly files frivolous lawsuits, ignores repair requests and does construction work that spreads clouds of toxic dust into their apartments.

"In a community with a lot of landlord-tenant disputes, he stands out," said Sen. Daniel Squadron (D-Manhattan), who has fielded dozens of tenant complaints.

Schneiderman says Falconite is an integral part of that campaign, alleging that he has "coordinated with landlords to offer buyouts under circumstances meant to coerce tenants into vacating the property."



Croman executive Oren Goldstein called Falconite "a licensed professional. He served New York City for 17 years as a police officer, firefighter and fire marshal and retired with over 100 commendations for excellence and meritorious service. In all of his dealings with us, he has acted professionally and consistent with legal requirements."



Steven Croman, with wife Harriet, owns scores of Manhattan buildings. His firm hired Falconite and hailed him as a pro. (ASTRID STAWIARZ/GETTY IMAGES FOR DUJOUR)

Tenants have a different view. In several Croman buildings, they've distributed leaflets with his photo warning, "Tenants beware! Do not let this man into your apartment!"

"He said 'I am a private investigator' and he reaches to his waist like when the policeman is going to grab a gun," said tenant Nelida Godfrey. She said Falconite twice tried to force his way into her \$2,350-a-month, 2-room apartment in Greenwich Village. The 54-year-old said during his second visit he grabbed for her phone when she began taping their increasingly hostile exchange.

"He said, 'Don't take pictures of me,' " she said. "I'm a little afraid because I confront him. Maybe I shouldn't."

One tenant who wished to remain anonymous recalled how Falconite and a property manager arrived at the doorstep shortly after Croman bought the E. Eighth St. building in the East Village. The tenant pays \$1,250 for a small 435-square-foot, one-bedroom where one-beds go for \$1,900.



Tenants have distributed leaflets with Falconite's photo warning, 'Tenants beware! Do not let this man into your apartment!' (KEN MURRAY/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

"He kind of made it seem he was there under the guise of fixing things that needed to be fixed," the tenant said.

But when they entered the apartment, they began asking questions about the plans. "The first thing was, 'Do you want a buyout? Do you want a buyout?' " the tenant added. After the tenant asked them to leave because of a prior appointment, Falconite pressured the resident to let him back in while the tenant was absent. The tenant refused. "I was aware of how they operate," the tenant said.

With Chelsia Rose Marcus

Sign up for BREAKING NEWS Emails

Sign Up

[privacy policy](#)

© 2016 New York Daily News