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## 'Madoff of landlords' gets hit with felony charges, lawsuit

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With all the attention being paid to affordable housing in New York City, it was only a matter of time that the city's landlords would come under some intense scrutiny. And on Monday, one of New York's most controversial landlords, Steven Croman, got hauled into a Manhattan court room.

Croman – who New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman described as "essentially the Bernie Madoff of landlords" – pled not guilty to 20 felony charges that included tax fraud, grand larceny and falsifying business records. At the core of the criminal charges are allegations that he fraudulently received more than \$45 million in bank loans.

Schneiderman also hit Croman with a civil lawsuit, which accused the 49-year-old of buying rent-regulated buildings and then harassing tenants either to get them to accept buyouts or to force them out by neglecting the buildings where they lived. Croman did this so he could convert the buildings into market-rate apartments, the lawsuit charged.

"These are the most serious set of criminal charges brought against a bad landlord in anyone's living memory," Schneiderman said in a press conference on Monday.

In a press release, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said the era of handling tenant harassment only in housing court was over.

"For justice to be served and for tenants to be righteously protected, criminal and civil wrongdoing that harasses rent regulated tenants demands the weight of a prosecutorial solution," Cuomo said.

Croman owns more than 140 rental buildings in Manhattan and operates his business under the name of 9300 Realty. He has angered so many of the people who rent from him that they formed an alliance to document their grievances.

On the criminal front, Schneiderman also hit Croman's mortgage broker, Barry Swartz, with 15 felony charges. And on the civil

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tenants.

Croman's high-profile lawyer – Benjamin Brafman, who is representing notorious "Pharma Bro" Martin Shkreli and has handled cases for rappers Jay Z and Sean Combs as well as former International Monetary Fund chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn – said his client would fight the charges.

"Mr. Croman intends to address these issues in a responsible fashion," Brafman told reporters Monday. According to a quote in the New York Times, Brafman added: "The charges in this case are defensible."

*J. "Josh" Jennings Moss has spent time on the police beat in Florida, on the political trail in Washington, D.C., and on the business front in New York. Among the places he's journalized: Condé Nast Portfolio, FoxNews.com, ABCNews.com, the Advocate, the Washington Times, and the Tampa Tribune. Josh graduated from the University of Arizona and lives in New York City.*

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