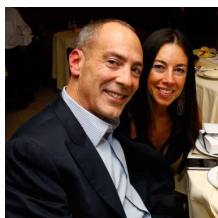


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Notoriously Terrible New York Landlord Charged With 20 Felonies

By Joe DeLessio



Steven Croman and his wife, Harriet. Photo: Astrid Stawiarz/2013 Getty Images

Even in a city filled with bad landlords, Steven Croman stood out. A regular on “[worst landlord](#)” lists, his company would buy up Manhattan apartment buildings, then push for tenants in rent-regulated apartments to leave, either by buying out their leases or, tenants said, harassing them until they left. Then, once he deregulated the rent-stabilized apartments, he would charge much higher rents. But this morning Croman [was charged](#) with 20 felonies, including grand larceny, falsifying business records, and a scheme to defraud; he faces up to 25 years in prison.

That’s not all the bad news for Croman: The *Times* reports that the New York state attorney general’s office also sued Croman today, seeking to force him not just to give up his real-estate business, but to pay millions of dollars in restitution to tenants and penalties. In its lawsuit, the attorney general’s office, which investigated Croman for nearly two years, accused him of harassing and coercing “countless working-class and low-income families out of their longtime homes.”

The *Times* details how badly Croman wanted to push tenants out of rent-controlled apartments. He was said to offer modest buyouts of no more than a few thousand dollars, and property managers who persuaded a tenant to take one could earn a bonus of up to \$10,000. According to the lawsuit, Croman would walk around his office chanting “buyouts, buyouts.”

But when tenants didn’t leave voluntarily, the lawsuit claims he would try to force them out using other methods. For instance, according to the suit, he would fail to make repairs or maintain basic services such as heat, electricity, and hot water. Croman’s companies also repeatedly filed baseless lawsuits against tenants, to aggravate them.

It gets worse: Once a tenant was pushed out, Cronan would renovate the apartment to justify increasing the rent to market rate, but the attorney general’s office said it found plenty of examples of illegal construction. On 175 occasions, according to the lawsuit, his companies did work without the proper permits; he’d also tell his employees to ignore Department of Buildings orders to stop working. The Department of Health found lots of violations too: It detected impermissibly high levels of lead dust on more than 20 occasions, including levels more than 65 times the legal threshold. According to the suit, even when the Department of Health ordered him to address the lead hazards, he did not.

Croman’s mortgage broker, Barry Swartz, 53, was also charged with 15 felonies today. Both Croman and Swartz pleaded not guilty to the criminal charges.

Sources: NYT

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