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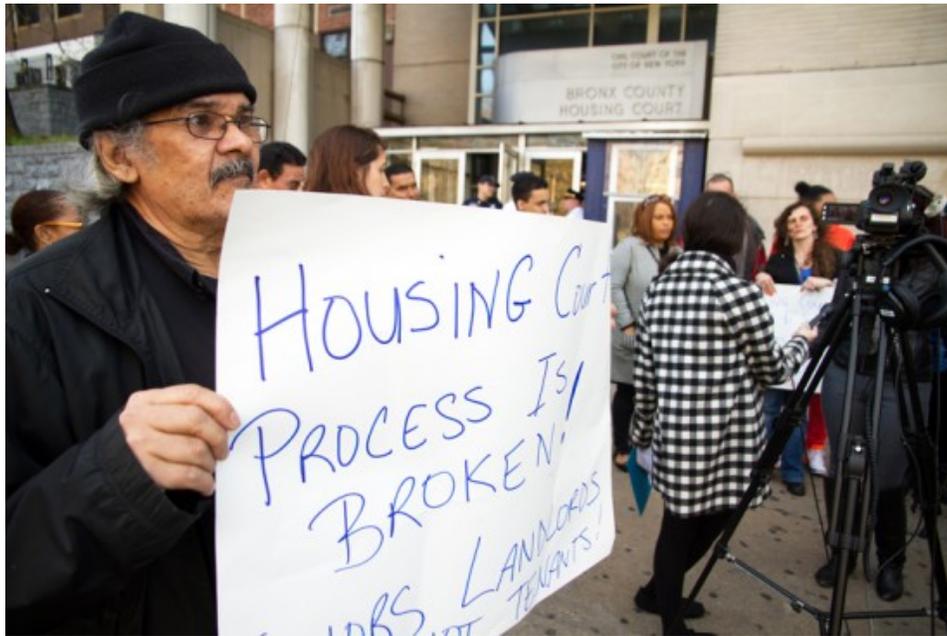
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SOUTHERN BLVD. RESIDENTS RALLY AT HOUSING COURT

Tenants argue the court system is not helping them fight an abusive landlord, but instead is helping the owner to punish them for complaining.

By Irina Ivanova () / April 17, 2013





(https://brie.hunter.cuny.edu/hpe/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/southern_rally.jpg)

A tenant of 1058 Southern Blvd. protested at Bronx housing court on April 17.

Tenants of one of city's worst buildings say landlord is harassing them

The tenants of a rundown building in Longwood say their landlord is threatening to evict them for demanding repairs.

Seven tenants of 1058 Southern Blvd. came to Bronx housing court today to protest what they call landlord harassment, and asked the court to consolidate their individual cases into a class action.

“Not only do we have to deal with living in buildings that are in very bad disrepair, we have a court system that is working for the landlords,” said Lisa Ortega, a representative for the building’s tenants’ association.

The 55-apartment building has a history of hazardous conditions

(<https://brie.hunter.cuny.edu/hpe/2013/03/08/longwood-tenants-look-to-oust-deadbeat-landlord/>), including leaks, mold and lead paint. In January 2013, they told their landlord, Miriam Shasho of Brooklyn, that they would file for a 7A motion, which would remove the building from her control.

That same month, the city entered the building into the Alternative Enforcement Program, which increases fines for violations and allows the Department of Housing Preservation and Development to make emergency repairs.

As the city slowly repairs the worst violations, about half the building’s tenants have received eviction threats, and court summonses claiming they owe back rent.

The tenants told a judge on April 17 that they don’t owe rent.



“Even though I pay rent, I still got the notice,” said resident Ronald Boddie, who has been living in the building 11 months.

He attributed the city’s repairs and the harassment to the tenants’ persistent complaints, and said it was important for the group to present a unified front.

“We know sooner or later there’s going to be retaliation,” he said.

Another tenant, Antonia Ayala, said Shasho called Ayala’s boss in Florida and claimed Ayala wasn’t paying her rent.

Ayala moved in March 1 and paid the first and last month’s rent, she said. She hasn’t paid the rent for April because Shasho has not given her a formal lease.

Ortega said that even though the housing department’s repairs are starting to improve conditions in the decrepit building, tenants have moved out because they are being harassed.

“I’m so sad because a lot of people think the answer is moving out,” Ortega said, adding that she and six other tenants asked the housing court supervisor to consolidate their cases and assign them a lawyer today, which the court declined.

“They said they couldn’t do that,” Ortega said. She added that the tenants would deliver a written request to the judge.

The tenants association is working with the Urban Justice Center on its petition, but does not have a lawyer to defend individual tenants against eviction notices.

“It would be nice if the court could understand that in cases like this it’s really a systematic issue,” said Kerri White, director of organizing and policy at the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board.

City Council member Maria del Carmen Arroyo issued a statement of support.

“I support the tenants in their efforts and will continue to work with them to ensure the owner is held accountable,” Arroyo said in a press release.

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