

New York, NY - Yesterday, 23 rent-stabilized tenants at 74 Post Avenue in Manhattan sued their landlord for failing to make repairs to their building following a four-alarm fire on January 5, 2021.

Tenants, who have been out of the fire-damaged building for almost three months, are living in shelters, with family and friends, and in hotels at their own expense, putting themselves and their families at risk of Covid-19. To date, landlord George Huang, named on the Public Advocates Worst Landlord List in 2018, who runs The Heights Real Estate Company has yet to make repairs to building, despite HPD's vacate order repair deadline of January 21, 2021. Tenants allege that Huang is trying to push them out of their apartments permanently so he can renovate the apartments and charge a higher rent to new tenants. Tenants are being represented by Manhattan Legal Service's Tenant Rights Coalition.

Read the complaint [here](#)

See photos of fire damage [here](#)

Read State Sen. Jackson's letter of support [here](#)

"This has all been so upsetting," said **Lina Baez, a tenant in the building**. "This has been my home for the past 30 years and we have no idea when we'll be able to move back in. My husband and I are subletting an apartment right now, but many elderly tenants are in shelters. This has also been incredibly rough on my elderly mother who is staying with her sisters right now. We just want to return home. We lost everything and the landlord clearly doesn't care. He just left us at the mercy of shelter system. They are clearly a corporation looking to make money, hoping we don't return so they can flip these apartments and rent them out again."

"I like everything has been turned upside down," said **Jose Moreno, a Spanish-speaking tenant and father of three who has lived in the building for the past 25 years with his wife**. "There are five of us in a hotel right now and have little clothes, commodities, or other items. It's very uncomfortable. The worst part was when three of us got Covid and we had to socially distance ourselves from our son which was hard in this small hotel room. The landlord is just waiting for us to get exasperated and find another place to so he can make repairs and rent it for a higher price."

On January 5, 2021, a four-alarm fire broke out on the top floor of 74 Post Avenue, a 33-unit building in Inwood, burning for hours and destroying big parts of the building. On January 6, 2021, the NYC Department of Buildings issued a partial vacate order requiring that all 33 units at 74 Post Avenue to be vacated. On January 19, 2021, the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development also issued a partial vacate order due to address the fire damage, among other issues. Some tenants have moved to other units permanently while others are temporarily staying with friends/family, in shelters, and in hotels with the aim of moving back in the building.

Today's lawsuit calls on NYC Housing Court to order the landlord to assist with relocation costs and to repair all outstanding building violations so tenants can safely return to their homes. The damage includes an open roof, charred wood joists, open ceilings, unbraced fire rated walls, smoke and water damage throughout building, lack of electricity, lack of gas, and lack of hot water, and asbestos. In addition, the lawsuit seeks a court order requiring the landlord to update tenants, HPD, and the Court on the progress of the reasonable plan to correct damage in the building on a weekly basis and to impose civil penalties if the landlord does not comply.

"The tenants of 74 Post Avenue have had enough," said **Assembly Member Carmen De La Rosa**. "The landlord's unscrupulous tactics have put at risk their lives and their homes. A fire is a tragedy, not an opportunity to further displace tenants. The families at 74 Post Avenue have paid their rent on time for years and at this moment they need to be treated with dignity and compassion. I am grateful for the support of Manhattan Legal Services and the HP action they have initiated. We hope that after this action concludes the tenants will be able to return to fully renovated apartments where they can live in peace within our community."

"I fully support the Housing Part action Manhattan Legal Services has filed on behalf of the tenants of 74 Post Avenue," said **New York State Senator Robert Jackson**. "The legal team has gone above and beyond! The Heights Real Estate Company, on the other hand, was negligent in allowing this fire to happen in the first place, ignoring tenant concerns about the electrical wiring. They were negligent in their initial response to the fire, failing to provide security or keep tenants or their possessions safe. And they continue to be negligent by delaying temporary relocation efforts and seeking to force tenants to settle in new apartments permanently. If, as I fear, this landlord has plans to try to combine as many apartments as possible during reconstruction to avoid rent regulation now that we have strengthened rent stabilization laws in Albany, it is reprehensible and morally bankrupt. I will do everything in my power to stop this from happening and support the tenants' right to a swift return to 74 Post Avenue. Their organization in the face of such adversity is an inspiration to us all."

"The fire at 74 Post Avenue upended the lives of many of the tenants. We need to make sure that they are receiving all of the support necessary during these difficult times. We cannot allow any landlord to push tenants out their homes for their own personal gain," said **Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez**. "I will be working with my colleagues across government to ensure these tenants may return to their apartments without fear of being kicked or priced out."

“Keeping tenants out of their homes during a global health crisis is unconscionable,” said **Lelia James, an attorney at Manhattan Legal Services™ Tenant Rights Coalition, who is representing the clients in this case.** “In addition to the devastation of losing their belongings in a fire, these poor tenants have been out of their homes for almost three months now, putting themselves and their families at constant risk of Covid. Tenants have pleaded with the landlord to temporarily relocate them and to make the necessary repairs so that they can return home, but the landlord has done nothing – not even filing the work permits necessary to begin the repairs. But enough is enough. Tenants are now taking legal action to force the landlord to do both.”

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ABOUT MANHATTAN LEGAL SERVICES™ TENANT RIGHTS COALITION

Manhattan Legal Services™ Tenant Rights Coalition, a program of Legal Services NYC, fights poverty and seeks racial, social, and economic justice for low-income New Yorkers. For 50 years, Manhattan Legal Services has challenged systemic injustice and helped clients meet basic needs for housing, access to high-quality education, health care, family stability, and income and economic security. Legal Services NYC is the largest civil legal services provider in the country, with neighborhood-based offices across all five boroughs helping more than 110,000 New Yorkers annually. The work of Manhattan Legal Services™ Tenant Rights Coalition is funded by NYC Human Resources Administration’s Anti-Harassment and Tenant Protection program.