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**NEW YORK CITY FILES A LAWSUIT AGAINST BROOKLYN LANDLORDS  
ACCUSED OF EGREGIOUS AND ILLEGAL EVICTION, HARASSMENT OF  
TENANTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**NEW YORK**—The City of New York filed a lawsuit today against landlords Gennaro Brooks-Church and Loretta Gendville, joint owners of 1214 Dean Street, a residential property in Brooklyn, as it takes steps to help tenants facing unlawful eviction. The lawsuit represents the Administration’s emphasis on enforcing the laws that protect tenants and is an example of how the City will not tolerate harassment during this unprecedented crisis.

“This Administration will not tolerate landlords who illegally evict and harass tenants out of their homes, and we will take forceful action like today’s lawsuit to make that very clear,” said **Ricardo Martínez Campos, Deputy Director for the Mayor’s Office to Protect Tenants**. “For landlords who think they can rely on these tactics and make them part of their business model, know that you are on notice, and we will not hesitate to bring you to Court.”

“Our Office would like to thank the City’s Law Department for working closely with us to bring this case, as well as the tenants of 1214 Dean Street who recounted their difficult stories for us time and again. It is our hope that this case will have implications that reach beyond 1214 Dean Street and will make clear that tenants should be treated with dignity and respect, and that their rights under the law must be observed,” said **Greta Aiken, Outreach and Engagement Coordinator for the Mayor’s Office to Protect Tenants**.

"Ensuring New Yorkers have a safe, quality home and protecting renters from harassment and illegal eviction is more important now than ever," said **Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development Vicki Been**. “This action serves as a warning: If you violate tenants' rights, we will take action.”

“Home should be where you feel you can put your head on your pillow and rest easy. In a time of pandemic, it should be the place you feel most safe”, said **NYC Corporation Counsel James E. Johnson**. “Today, we’re filing suit to ensure that safety and hold landlords accountable for their illegal and heartless acts. We have the tools to dismantle these egregious schemes and we will aggressively use them.”

“Inflicting additional trauma onto those struggling to stay afloat during a pandemic by threatening eviction without process is not only immoral, but illegal,” **New York State Attorney General Letitia James said.** “No one should fear having their home taken away at a time when their very life depends on social distancing and staying home; and no one should live in fear of reprisal from their landlord for asserting their lawful rights. Our investigation, working in tandem with the City’s lawsuit, will hold these landlords accountable for any illegal actions and will place other landlords on notice that they will be held accountable for unlawful eviction. ”

In July of this year, Brooks-Church and Gendville blatantly harassed the tenants of 1214 Dean Street, illegally evicting at least four tenants during the COVID-19 pandemic. The City’s Law Department responded with a Cease and Desist letter sent to the landlords on July 10<sup>th</sup>.

Today, the Law Department, working with the Mayor’s Office to Protect Tenants (MOPT), sued Gendville and Brooks-Church. The City seeks civil penalties for violations of the NYC Unlawful Eviction Law, a finding of Tenant Harassment against defendants, correction of construction code violations that include unpermitted construction and illegal conversion, and civil penalties for those violations.

By seeking civil penalties, the City seeks to reverse any windfall that landlords may receive from their bad acts, and to broadcast a message that other landlords think twice before illegally displacing tenants.

The City is also working with the New York State Office of the Attorney General, who also have an active investigation into the actions of the Brooks-Church and Gendville.

“In this time of extreme hardship, we’re going to be there for tenants and we’ve made it clear that tenant harassment will not fly under the radar of this Administration,” **said HPD Commissioner Louise Carroll.** “I thank all of our city and state partners for working together to hold landlords accountable and to protect New York City tenants in the middle of the pandemic, and every other day.”

"Tenants deserve safe, legal housing, and should not be forced from their homes - not now, not ever, and certainly not during a pandemic," said **DOB Commissioner Melanie La Rocca.** "New Yorkers look out for their neighbors, and that's what we're doing here. We are proud to work alongside our partner agencies to protect the rights of tenants and help to build a fairer city for all."

The City Unlawful Eviction Law affords the City the ability to advance tenants’ rights even where tenants themselves are unable or too intimidated to bring their own action before a Court. This lawsuit reaffirms City policy and values that no one should be removed from their home without required legal process.

The 1214 Dean Street litigation is the result of sustained efforts by the current administration to strengthen tenant protection work across its agencies.

Mayor Bill de Blasio created the Mayor’s Office to Protect Tenants (MOPT) in 2019 to coordinate the City’s range of tenant protection efforts. HPD expanded its tenant protection work with the establishment of its Anti-Harassment Unit in 2019, and the Law Department’s Affirmative Litigation Division assembled a special tenant protection team also in 2019.

The Office of the Tenant Advocate was established at the Department of Buildings in 2017. DOB and HPD ensure buildings are safe and living conditions habitable, and together with the Law Department and MOPT, they work to counter illegal landlord harassment.

“I am appalled at the disgraceful actions of these landlords. I applaud the City—and the local community of neighbors and tenant organizations—for being vigilant and preventing unlawful evictions and protecting New Yorkers from harassment,” said **State Senator Brian Kavanagh, Chair of the Senate Housing Committee**. “This lawsuit is an important step not only for the tenants of these buildings but for all of us who have fought hard over the years to strengthen tenant protections—and are fighting now to ensure that people have a secure place to live and do not endure the wrenching process of being displaced from their homes in the midst of this pandemic. Hopefully this lawsuit sends a stark message to others who are seeking to skirt our housing laws and intimidate New Yorkers for profit: You will be held accountable.”

“The city’s action against these unscrupulous property owners sends a clear and powerful message that tenant harassment and illegal evictions in the middle of a pandemic will not be tolerated,” said **Assembly Member Steven Cymbrowitz (D-Brooklyn), Chair of the Assembly Housing Committee**. “Now more than ever, with so many New Yorkers dealing with the economic consequences of COVID, we need to do all we can to keep people in their homes and communities.”

"If we are serious about stopping illegal evictions, we need swift action. I want to thank the Mayor’s Office to Protect Tenants for taking legal action against the landlords of 1214 Dean Street. I also want to thank the grassroots activists who not only pushed a legal resolution, but who organized fundraisers to support the tenants. The Crown Height Mutual Aid raised nearly \$10,000 for them, and they have been instrumental to make sure the tenants of 1214 Dean get the support they deserve," said **Council Member Robert E. Cornegy, Jr.**

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