



**LEGAL
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TENANTS PROTEST ILLEGAL EVICTIONS

Tenants Facing Illegal Lockouts and Evictions Have Nowhere to Go City Councilmembers Jumaane Williams and Steven Levin Call for Action

NEW YORK, NY, OCTOBER 14, 2014—Vowing to continue their campaign to end illegal lockouts and evictions, tenants of three-quarter houses spoke out about landlords' abusive practices on the steps of City Hall today. They were joined by City Council Members Jumaane Williams and Steven Levin, who pledged their continued support of tenants' demands.

Darryl Herring, a leader of the Three-Quarter House Tenant Organizing Project (TOP), described how hundreds of tenants have been routinely evicted by operators, often with the help of police. The situation led TOP to organize a citywide campaign against illegal lockouts, which resulted in the NYPD issuing a citywide directive (known as a FINEST message) clarifying that evictions can only be made with a court order.

“For years, three-quarter operators have claimed that they run transitional ‘programs,’ and can ‘discharge’ tenants whenever they want,” said Matthew Main, an attorney with MFY Legal Services, which defends three-quarter house tenants. “With the NYPD directive in hand, tenants have a way to defend themselves. It’s an important first step in stopping this abuse.”

When Gary Crawford refused to leave his three-quarter house after he was awakened in the middle of the night and told to get out, the house manager called the police, who told Crawford he had to leave. He went to Housing Court several times to get a judge to reinstate him, and contacted MFY Legal Services for help. He was reinstated with MFY’s help, but spent weeks sleeping on subway platforms and the street before once again having a roof over his head.

Another resident, Leonard Washington, said: “I was doing my thing, doing well. They gave me an hour to leave. They said they’d call the police if I didn’t. I took as much as I could carry and left everything else behind. I was homeless. I stayed on the street for two weeks.”

José Capo described how his landlord locked him out of his three-quarter house and told him that they would not let him back in without a court order. “I moved to the three-quarter house because I needed a roof over my head and it was the only place I could afford. I went to school, did job training, and earned a certificate. My world fell apart when they put me out,” he said. When the landlord ignored the court order Mr. Capo got ordering the landlord to let him return home, Mr.

Capo called the police and showed them a copy of the FINEST Message that he kept in his pocket. The police told the landlord that illegal eviction is a crime and ordered the landlord to let Mr. Capo back into his room, keeping him from becoming homeless. “I really don’t know where I’d be if the police didn’t help me get back in that night,” Mr. Capo said.

“Illegal evictions in Three-Quarter Houses are extremely harmful and destabilizing to a tenant, and often force those evicted into uncertain futures,” said City Council Member Jumaane D. Williams, Chair of the Council’s Housing and Buildings Committee. “Whether living in a three-quarter house or not, all tenants deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and their rights need to be protected. I applaud the Tenant Organizing Project for advocating against illegal evictions by working with the NYPD to protect New York’s most vulnerable tenants, but hope police officers do more to ensure bad landlords do not violate the law.”

Three-quarter houses are privately owned, for-profit residences that rent out rooms to New York City’s most vulnerable individuals, including people who recovering from substance abuse, reentering society after being incarcerated, trying to get themselves off of the street, or are suffering from mental illness. While the exact number of three-quarter houses is unknown, researchers at John Jay College’s Prisoner Reentry Institute have identified at least 317, including 250 in Brooklyn alone. Although three-quarter house operators often describe their houses as “programs,” they offer no services beyond a bed and are unlicensed and unregulated.

MFY Legal Services provides free civil legal services to more than 9,000 poor and low-income New Yorkers annually in housing, public benefits, health, consumer, foreclosure and employment matters. **Neighbors Together** is a community-based organization in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn, which works to end hunger and poverty in the surrounding communities, providing emergency food, social services, and support for tenants to organize for systemic change. MFY collaborated with Neighbors Together and three-quarter house residents to create the **Three-Quarter House Tenant Organizing Project (TOP)**, a tenant-run organization fighting for fair and just treatment of three-quarter house tenants. TOP holds regular meetings and workshops at Neighbors Together, which serves as the nexus of grassroots activity for three-quarter house residents who live in houses throughout Brownsville, East New York, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Bushwick and surrounding neighborhoods. With the emergence of three-quarter houses in the Bronx, the work includes Bronx residents as well.

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Press conference images:

Daryl Herring: <http://www.mfy.org/wp-content/uploads/Daryl-Herring-e1413324622651.jpg>

Gary Crawford: <http://www.mfy.org/wp-content/uploads/Gary-Crawford-e1413324761353.jpg>

Jose Capo: <http://www.mfy.org/wp-content/uploads/Jose-Capo-e1413324932223.jpg>

Matthew Main: <http://www.mfy.org/wp-content/uploads/Matthew-Main.jpg>

Jumaane Williams: <http://www.mfy.org/wp-content/uploads/Jumaane-Williams-e1413325036597.jpg>

For more information on three-quarter houses:

John Jay College Prisoner Reentry Institute Report—Three Quarter Houses: The View From the Inside at <http://johnjayresearch.org/pri/files/2013/10/PRI-TQH-Report.pdf>

