

March 5, 2020, Press conference regarding filing for declaratory judgment
Prepared statements of Susan Steinberg, TA president, and Steven Newmark,
TA board member and plaintiff

SUSAN STEINBERG

Five years ago, I stood before you to announce a new day for Stuyvesant Town-Peter Cooper Village.

Our community had been battered with MCIs by MetLife, tortured with Golub notices by Tishman Speyer, and met with indifference by CWCcapital.

On that day in the fall of 2015, the future looked rosy: we had a new owner, Blackstone, who had pledged themselves to affordability. We welcomed them in as the solution to our problems—and to a significant degree, they were.

Today, however, we are again in a situation of uncertainty with an owner that appears to be on the cusp of engaging in practices that are not consistent with the law. What happened?

Of the 11,242 units in Stuy Town, 5,000 of them were legally bound to a regulatory agreement that we negotiated—to ensure the long-term affordability for middle-class New Yorkers. The rest of the units were on a countdown to deregulation starting July 1, 2020, the day after the J-51 tax abatement expired.

1,400 of those units, which were below market rate, were set to lose their rent protections. As part of our deal with Blackstone, we negotiated a rent increase of 5 percent per year over 5 years. It wasn't everything, but it was something.

And that is why we were so grateful when the state legislature passed the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act on June 14, 2019. It closed loopholes and overturned years of unfair landlord practices that had weakened rent regulations and caused evictions, homelessness, and unnecessary suffering.

Thankfully, the new 2019 rent laws were very specific. Units that were rent stabilized as of June 14, 2019, would remain rent stabilized. For our community, that meant the tenants in all units on the property could now exhale because they would no longer be subject to deregulation. And that 5 percent increase per year no longer is applicable. As rent-stabilized tenants, these units are subject to whatever the Rent Guidelines Board determines.

The new law is clear and unambiguous.

Blackstone Group is of the opinion that these pro-tenant reforms do not apply to them. We disagree.

They cannot disregard state law and raise rents and deregulate units as if the law had never been changed. That is why the Tenants Association sees no other avenue than to file a motion

in court to get clarity on the law, and to remove all ambiguity in advance of any tenant seeing an illegal rent increase or removal from regulation.

Let me just say that Blackstone personally committed to me that they will abide by Rent Guidelines Board increases until such time as the court makes its decision—even if it takes many months. They want clarity in the law as much as we do.

I want to thank our elected representatives—Senator Brad Hoylman, Assembly Member Harvey Epstein, and Council Member Keith Powers, as well as other of our elected—who have stood with us shoulder to shoulder in our efforts to protect a unique residential community. Our Albany representatives wrote the law that protected these residents. They know exactly what they intended, and they know precisely what it means. With their continued help and support, we will prevail.

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STEVEN NEWMARK

My name is Steven Newmark, and I am a *Roberts* tenant and a named plaintiff in this declaratory judgment action. I have lived in Stuyvesant Town with my wife for 13 years. My family and I are tired of the constant uncertainty with our housing situation.

Inherent in the term *rent stabilization* is the idea of stability. Stability: a housing concept that my family has never really known. But thanks to the New York State legislature—led by Senator Hoylman and Assembly Member Epstein—along with Governor Cuomo for signing the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act, families like mine were finally able to achieve that magic word—stability.

But now we are again being treated like a pinball in a machine. The anxiety my family feels over our future is real.

I love this neighborhood. I love this city. My wife and I have devoted ourselves to being good citizens of both this neighborhood and our city: we both work at local nonprofits and volunteer our limited free time to local community groups. Our children attend local schools. And we want to stay here and help this community thrive.

And the law that Governor Cuomo signed last June allows just that. To make us fight just to get a law enforced feels just unfair and frankly punitive.

I'm tired. My wife is tired. We just want stability in our housing!

We look forward to the Court confirming what the law says in black and white, what the legislators here today who helped write the bill know: that *all rent-stabilized units* like ours are covered by the HSTPA.

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