

FAIR HOUSING
JUSTICE
CENTER



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WOMAN CHARGES FORMER LANDLORDS WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Yesterday, a sexual harassment lawsuit was filed in state court by attorney Mariann Meier Wang of Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady LLP on behalf of a former female tenant of a Brooklyn apartment building. The tenant alleges that when she lived at the 20-unit building, one of the owners, Robert Berezin, sexually harassed her, including touching her inappropriately without her consent, visiting her apartment without notice and trying to enter without her consent, and retaliating against her when she objected to his behavior by failing to make necessary repairs.

The lawsuit alleges that when the tenant complained to the building's co-owner, Robert Lewis, he did not take any action to correct the situation. The complaint names both Berezin and Lewis as defendants and seeks a court order prohibiting future discrimination and damages pursuant to the federal Fair Housing Act, the New York State Human Rights Law, and the New York City Human Rights Law.

In 2006, with the assistance of the Fair Housing Justice Center (FHJC), the tenant filed a civil rights complaint with the Civil Rights Bureau of the Office of the New York Attorney General. In response to her complaint and based on additional investigation conducted by the Bureau, the New York Attorney General filed a lawsuit on February 6, 2007 in New York Supreme Court against Berezin and the co-owners of three Brooklyn apartment buildings. The lawsuit alleges that Robert Berezin sexually harassed numerous female tenants over a period of ten years.

Diane Houk, FHJC Executive Director, remarked “Everyone needs to feel safe where they live. When a landlord sexually harasses tenants and then retaliates when sexual advances are rebuffed, home ceases to be a safe and secure place.” Houk stated that the Fair Housing Justice Center has received numerous complaints during the past year alleging sexual harassment by landlords and building superintendents in New York. Houk added, “Fair housing laws not only guarantee access to housing, but also ensure that everyone has the right to peacefully enjoy that residence, free from discrimination and harassment.”

Laurence Belinsky, President and CEO of HELP USA, an organization that provides housing to homeless people and works to prevent homelessness, stated: “Unfortunately, women of all economic backgrounds continue to face sexual harassment in the rental market in New York. HELP USA created the Fair Housing Justice Center to provide New Yorkers with a resource to fight for fairness in housing.”

The mission of the FHJC, opened in April 2005, is to challenge systemic housing discrimination, promote open and inclusive communities, and strengthen fair housing enforcement. The FHJC assists individuals and organizations that encounter illegal housing discrimination by providing counseling on fair housing rights, investigative assistance, and referrals to administrative agencies and cooperating attorneys. Individuals who encounter illegal housing discrimination should call the FHJC at (212) 400-8201.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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The Fair Housing Justice Center is a program of HELP USA.