
Hughes Hubbard & Reed

Firm Wins Fight Against Landlord

News & Events | Pro Bono

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After a protracted legal battle that prompted the unprecedented arrest of a delinquent landlord, Hughes Hubbard has finally negotiated a positive outcome for the Bronx tenants whose building had fallen into a severe state of disrepair.

Landlord Sam Suzuki, arrested after neglecting to meet various stipulations and court orders and failing to show up in court, served 23 days in the Manhattan Detention Complex. He was released July 26. Hughes Hubbard attorneys had defeated several motions and an emergency appeal to have the contempt order vacated.

After his release, Mr. Suzuki and Hunter Properties were fired from overseeing the apartment complex, and the building was transferred to a new management company. Hughes Hubbard attorneys negotiated a repair schedule with the new management. Repairs are currently under way to address the lengthy list of violations.

While this pro bono effort resulted in a happy ending for the over 40 families who live in this building, "it highlights the fact that many more people are not so lucky," said Beatrice Hamza-Bassey, who represented the tenants. "Hundreds of buildings remain in decrepit condition and thousands of families in every borough suffer through the same indignities that these tenants finally overcame."

The firm became involved in this case through the Legal Aid Society's "Adopt a Building" pro bono project, where law firms represent tenants who are endangered by irresponsible landlords. When Hughes Hubbard came onto the case, the Bronx tenants were on the verge of being forced out of their apartments and into the homeless shelter system, due to a raft of structural and safety issues, including holes in ceilings, crumbling floors, water damage, broken locks and vermin infestations.

The building contained over 500 violations, 70 of which were classified as the most severe and required by law to be resolved within 24 hours. These issues, however, had been festering for months, and in some cases, years. The building wound up in the City's Alternative Enforcement Program (AEF): the 200 worst residential buildings in the five boroughs.

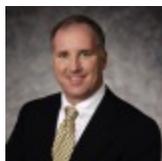
Hunter Properties managed the building with Mr. Suzuki, who had gained notoriety for neglecting several other city buildings.

Following the landlord's repeated failure to comply with stipulations and Court orders directing correction of the violations, the legal team's efforts culminated in the court's finding both the property management company and Mr. Suzuki in contempt and ordering substantial civil penalties payable to the tenants and the New York City Department of Housing and Preservation. When Mr. Suzuki failed to show up in court and failed to make a sufficient showing as to why he should not be held in contempt, Judge Jerald Klein issued a warrant for his arrest.

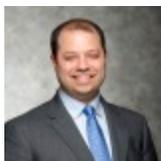
The arrest was an unprecedented event in New York's Housing Court and was widely reported in the New York Times, New York Daily News, Crains New York Business, WPIX, and NYOne, among other media outlets. The media heralded the rare action as a beacon of hope during these difficult times; tenants hailed this as a victory against the oppressive powers of one of the city's worst building managers.

The Hughes Hubbard team, led by Hamza-Bassey, included Steven DiCesare, Kelli Lane, Joseph Lee, Kevin Braker, Minnie Bellomo and Morgan Stecher.

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