



For Immediate Release

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Landlords Using Fire to Illegally Evict; Lawsuit Filed to Protect Elderly, Disabled Tenants

SANTA MONICA, Calif., April 13, 2016 — After a fire damaged their apartment building in December, the 20 low-income residents of the 17-unit rent-controlled building at 1605 Ocean Front Walk — many of whom are elderly or disabled — were left outside in the cold in the middle of the night with nowhere to sleep. According to a lawsuit filed today in Los Angeles Superior Court on behalf of nine displaced residents, the owners have adamantly refused to temporarily relocate their tenants and instead have focused on turning this tragedy into an opportunity to profit by removing these rent-controlled units from the rental market and prematurely terminating the Plaintiffs’ tenancies without “just cause.”

Although the cause of the fire is officially undetermined, plaintiffs allege that the fire was substantially caused by the landlords’ negligent maintenance of the premises — they failed to make necessary repairs and comply with local and state law. The owners refused to fix the in-wall heaters, forcing many of the elderly and disabled residents to use space heaters in order to keep warm. Smoke detectors, fire alarms and fire extinguishers that could have minimized the harm were also not working properly. Two residents were treated for smoke inhalation due to the fire.

Since the fire, the owners have continued to refuse to provide temporary relocation, as required by Santa Monica law. Since December, the owners have engaged in a campaign of harassment ranging from falsely informing the tenants that the fire terminated their tenancies and that the city required them to remove their belongings from their apartments to refusing to repair the building — all in an effort to get the tenants to permanently abandon their homes.

The lawsuit was filed today by the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles and The Scali Law Firm against Russell No. 8 Santa Monica Properties, LLC, and the company’s officers: Martin Mink, Florette Mink, Terry Mink and Rebecca Rakes. Attorneys are asking that the tenants be allowed to return to their homes, that the plaintiffs be paid their temporary housing allowances,

and damages be paid related to the emotional distress the tenants have experienced throughout this ordeal due to the owners callous treatment of their extremely vulnerable tenants.

The harassment of the Ocean Front Walk tenants exemplifies the problems faced by many other low-income and rent-controlled tenants in Santa Monica and throughout the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Those problems stem from an increasingly unaffordable housing market.

About Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA)

Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles is the frontline law firm for poor and low-income people in Los Angeles. It provides legal representation and other legal assistance to low-income people in civil legal matters. It has five offices in the Greater Los Angeles areas, along with four Self-Help Legal Access Centers at area courthouses and three domestic violence clinics.