



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

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HPD CONSTRUCTION PROJECT MANAGER CHARGED WITH RECKLESS ENDANGERMENT AND UNLAWFUL EVICTION

Margaret Garnett, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation (“DOI”), announced today that a City Housing Preservation and Development (“HPD”) Construction Project Manager has been charged with owning a Brooklyn property in which the cellar was illegally converted into an apartment; and endangering the welfare of a tenant who resided in that property. The criminal conduct is alleged to have taken place between January 2017 and March 2020. DOI’s investigation began in February 2020 after DOI was notified of an alleged illegal eviction conducted by an HPD employee. DOI worked on the investigation with the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office, which is also prosecuting the case.

LINGBO LIANG, 53, of Brooklyn, N.Y., was charged with one count each of Reckless Endangerment in the Second Degree, and Unlawful Eviction, both class A misdemeanors; and Unlawful Acts and Criminal Fines and Imprisonment, both violations of the City’s Administrative Code. Upon conviction, a class A misdemeanor is punishable by up to year’s incarceration; and violations are punishable by up to 15 days incarceration. LIANG was arrested in June and issued a Desk Appearance Ticket. She was arraigned today in Kings County Criminal Court and released. Her next court date is October 7, 2021.

LIANG began working at HPD in September 2005; and since December 2019 has worked as an HPD Construction Project Manager, whose duties and responsibilities include building inspections, authorization of repair work and oversight of contractors carrying out new construction, rehabilitation, and repairs, among other functions. LIANG receives an annual salary of approximately \$65,640 and has been suspended since her June arrest.

DOI Commissioner Margaret Garnett said, “Illegal apartment conversions are dangerous, criminal, and have no place in New York City. That the defendant in this matter is a City employee who was entrusted with building inspections and safety and had issued vacate orders for conditions that were similar to what was allegedly found on her property is deeply concerning. The defendant’s alleged participation in an illegal eviction of her tenant only compounds the violation of what we should expect from an employee of a City housing agency. I thank Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez and his office for their partnership on this investigation.”

According to the criminal complaint and findings of the investigation, the defendant owns 1958 West 9th St., in Brooklyn. Records from the City Department of Buildings (“DOB”) indicate that the property is registered as a private, two-family dwelling, which allows for two families to reside on the main and second floors but not in the cellar. The investigation found that a tenant resided at that property in a fully furnished cellar from January 2017 to January 2020. The defendant collected rent from the tenant; there was no written lease agreement and, initially, the tenant paid the defendant a monthly rent of \$880. In 2018, the defendant raised the monthly rent to \$1,500, which the tenant paid by check the first month and then the defendant directed the tenant that going forward the rent should only be paid in cash.

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The tenant called the New York City Police Department several times in January 2020 after disputes with the defendant, first because the defendant changed the locks on the cellar apartment and then again several days later, on January 19, 2020, when the defendant attempted to gain access to the cellar apartment by banging on his door with a hammer and the defendant subsequently began to remove the tenant's belongings and throw them into the street. Also on January 19, 2020, 311, which provides the public access to City services, received a complaint that people were seen living illegally in the cellar of the two-family home on 9th Street and were not paying rent. In response, a DOB inspector conducted an inspection the same day during which the defendant identified herself by showing her HPD badge. The DOB inspector observed that the cellar residence had illegal gas connections at the stove and the dryer and both were unsafe and unpermitted. Additionally, there was no secondary means of egress, and there were no walls or windows in the sleeping area. The DOB Inspector affixed a Partial Vacate Order on the cellar door and issued violations for work without a permit and for maintaining or converting the residence as a dwelling for more than the legally approved number of families authorized by the Certificate of Occupancy. After a court order was issued, the tenant regained supervised access of the cellar residence in March 2020. The tenant entered the apartment with police assistance and found all his personal property had been removed. During that event, the defendant told the tenant to "get out," indicated she did not know where the tenant's belongings were, and further indicated the tenant had moved out on January 31, 2020.

The defendant also told DOI investigators that there was no apartment in the cellar, the cellar only contained laundry and boiler rooms, and that at no time had a tenant lived in the cellar. The investigation found that in the past five years, in her role at HPD, the defendant had recommended vacate orders on at least four occasions, two of them for homes or apartments the defendant inspected where she found similar conditions to what the DOB Inspector observed at the defendant's property.

DOI Commissioner Margaret Garnett thanked Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez and his staff for their partnership on and prosecution of this matter. Commissioner Garnett also thanks HPD Commissioner Louise Carroll for her and her staff's cooperation on this investigation.

Assistant District Attorney Adam Libove of the Brooklyn District Attorney's Public Integrity Unit is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Chief of Public Integrity Laura Neubauer, Deputy Bureau Chief of Investigations Michael Spanakos, and Chief of Investigations Patricia McNeill.

The investigation was conducted by DOI's Office of the Inspector General for HPD, specifically, Confidential Investigators Emily Caswell and Jonathan Vega, and Investigative Attorney Marc Assa, under the supervision of Inspector General Jessica Heegan, Deputy Commissioner/Chief of Investigations Dominick Zarrella, and First Deputy Commissioner Daniel Cort.

A criminal complaint is an accusation. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country and New York City's corruption watchdog. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City. DOI's strategy attacks corruption comprehensively through systemic investigations that lead to high-impact arrests, preventive internal controls and operational reforms that improve the way the City runs.

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