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City Attorney Zach Klein Announces Lawsuit Against East Side Landlord as Tenants Go Without Heat During Winter Freeze

Says City moved swiftly to relocate affected units to temporary housing as Property Action Team looks to hold landlords accountable for poor conditions that led to system failures

COLUMBUS, OH—Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein today announced the Property Action Team has filed a lawsuit against the owners of the Life at Edgewater Landing apartment complex on the far east side following the failure of boiler systems that provide heat to units, forcing the City to evacuate dozens of units amid the ongoing frigid temperatures in Columbus.

The lawsuit, filed in Environmental Court, seeks to recoup the cost of relocating affected households to temporary housing under the City's recently-enacted Relocation Assistance Code, which requires landlords to cover relocation costs due to emergency vacate orders. This is the first property the City has filed against under this new ordinance.

“Working heat and running water is the bare minimum expected of landlords operating in the City of Columbus. If you fail to meet either of these—or other—basic needs and units need to be vacated, landlords should foot the bill and fix the problems, or get out of the business of being a landlord,” said Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein.

“Code Enforcement and the Department of Development responded swiftly to the situation at Edgewater Landing, offering temporary housing units to affected households, and we have a clear path to recoup these taxpayer costs utilizing the Relocation Assistance Code passed by Council and signed into law by Mayor Ginther last year. This is exactly the kind of situation this ordinance was designed for.”

According to Court documents, Code Enforcement has received several notices in recent months that units have been without heat due to a failing boiler system. With each notification, Code conducted inspections of the complex and spoke with property management to determine a solution, ultimately determining that the patchwork fixes being made were an insufficient long-term solution for a system that ultimately needs to be replaced.

Earlier this month, Code once again was made aware of a lack of heat at the premises, inspected the property and issued an emergency notice to repair the failing system. As management awaited a fix, Code notified ownership of their obligation to relocate any tenant should an emergency vacate order be issued.

Code conducted inspections of numerous units affected by the boiler outage, ultimately determining that the makeshift fixes for the system were insufficient to maintain acceptable temperatures, which led to 28 units being immediately vacated. A total of 49 units have been vacated.

In addition to issues with the heating systems, Code cited property owners for more than 100 additional violations over the past two years, with 51 violations remaining outstanding. Further, there have been more than 1,100 calls for police service to the premises over the past two years, including calls for violent crime, shootings, more than a dozen overdoses and a homicide.

“Landlords who fail to maintain basic living conditions need to be held accountable, and because of the work of Code, CPD and tenants who contacted the City about crime and quality of life issues, we were able to build a case to hold these landlords accountable and hopefully turn things around at Edgewater Landing. It’s what tenants and families deserve,” said Property Action Team attorney Sophie Yano.