



## San Diego City Attorney Mara W. Elliott

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### **Mid-City Slumlords Arraigned on 10 Counts**

*City Attorney prosecutes couple for maintaining dangerous, substandard housing*

The City Attorney's Office is prosecuting a La Jolla couple on behalf of seven Congolese refugee families that are living in a dangerous and substandard apartment complex in Mid-City.

The property owners, John and Mahin Nobel, were arraigned Monday and pled not guilty to 10 criminal charges for maintaining dangerous and substandard living conditions at the apartment complex at 5344 Rex Avenue in Mid-City. Property manager Devdatt Patel was also arraigned and pled not guilty.

The Nobels are repeat offenders who have been previously prosecuted for similar violations and for leasing to illegal marijuana dispensaries. Their Rex Avenue apartment complex was leased in July, August and September 2016 to seven families with young children. Upon move-in, the families complained about the substandard conditions, but their requests were ignored.

An inspector with the Code Enforcement Division of the Development Services Department found numerous violations, including mold, rodent and roach infestation, inadequate heating, inadequate sanitation, improper electrical connections, and a lack of proper fire exits and fire extinguishers. Outside the building, the inspector found human waste, graffiti, an accumulation of junk, and numerous structural and fire hazards.

Exit and fire violations were created when the apartments were illegally converted from two-bedroom units into three- or four-bedroom units.

Earlier this month, ruling in an administrative matter brought by the City Attorney's Office, Administrative Law Judge Michael Scarlett found the property was substandard under City and State codes and a public nuisance.

The judge ordered the Nobels to reimburse the City \$34,278 in relocation benefit payments advanced by the City to the seven families, assessed a civil liability of \$10,000 for their failure to pay relocation benefit payments directly to their tenants, and ordered them to reimburse the City \$6,845 in investigative costs.

At this hearing, a City code inspector testified that the Rex Avenue apartment complex was the most dangerous apartment complex he has inspected.

**"It is unacceptable that these young children and their families lived in life-threatening and unsanitary conditions,"** City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. **"Our Office will prosecute slumlords who refuse to comply with the law and exploit vulnerable people to maximize their personal gain."**

The criminal case is being prosecuted by Deputy City Attorney Onuoma Omordia. The administrative hearing was argued for the City by Deputy City Attorney Patricia Miranda. Both work for the Code Enforcement Unit of the City Attorney's Office.

The Code Enforcement Unit was established in 1984 to address nuisance properties and blight throughout the San Diego. This unit works in partnership with the Code Enforcement Division of the City Development Services Department, the San Diego Police Department, and the community to identify and aggressively address problem properties.

Community members can report property violations to the City Attorney's Code Enforcement Unit at 619-533-5655.

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