

Catholic order agrees to halt evictions of rooming house residents amid AG probe



NATHAN KLIMA FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

A piece of caution tape hangs on a power line outside of Our Lady's Guild House in Fenway.

By [Robert Weisman](#)

GLOBE STAFF MARCH 20, 2019

A religious order that owns a rooming house for single women in Boston's Kenmore Square has agreed to a six-month stay of eviction proceedings against residents as state Attorney General Maura Healey's office investigates possible housing discrimination there.

In letter to a lawyer for Our Lady's Guild House and a realty company that manages the rental property, Assistant Attorney General Tara Dunn confirmed her office is looking into "unfair and discriminatory acts" at 20 Charlesgate West, a 130-room brick structure overlooking the Massachusetts Turnpike. The single-room occupancy building is owned by Daughters of Mary of the Immaculate Conception, a Catholic religious order based in New Britain, Conn.

ADVERTISING



inRead invented by Teads

The inquiry includes allegations of discrimination against older residents and residents with disabilities, according to a spokeswoman for the attorney general's office.

Robert Russo, who represents the Guild House and property manager Mark Roos Realty, signed an agreement with the attorney general Wednesday that management will "cease and desist" from evicting tenants for six months during the probe.

At least eight residents of the rooming house will likely be protected by the agreement, including some who are in housing court and others who have overstayed their leases and are at risk of eviction, said Colleen Fitzpatrick, a community organizer for Fenway Community Development Corporation who's been working with the Guild House tenants.

"It's a huge relief," Fitzpatrick said. "These tenants were worried about what would happen at their next housing court dates. This takes the pressure off. And it's good to know the

attorney general’s really going to be digging into this age discrimination.”

Longtime residents of the Guild House have accused its owners of age discrimination, alleging the Daughters are trying to replace older residents — some of whom have lived in the rooming house for decades — with international students and others who can afford to pay higher rents. Over the past decade, as management has raised rents and instituted short-term leases, the makeup of the building has changed from a majority of low-income older women to mostly younger students.

Our Lady’s Guild House was incorporated in 1947 as a public charity. While part of the building is on the Boston tax rolls, another part — including a chapel — remains tax exempt.

About five years after the Connecticut order’s leadership changed in 2007, the order hired Mark Roos Realty, based around the corner from the rooming house, to manage the property. The move led to a series of significant rent hikes, pushing out the majority of long-term tenants.

Don Martelli, a spokesman for the guild house, said its original mission was to provide short-term housing to single women, though he acknowledged that many tenants were allowed to become long-term residents in the past.

Martelli released a statement, saying in part, “The building remains one where women can take advantage of the affordable rent and convenience of living in the heart of downtown Boston as they look for long-term housing plans.”

Robert Weisman can be reached at robert.weisman@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@GlobeRobW](https://twitter.com/GlobeRobW).