

RPL Section 223-b Retaliation by landlord against tenant

1. No landlord of premises or units to which this section is applicable shall serve a notice to quit upon any tenant or commence any action to recover real property or summary proceeding to recover possession of real property in retaliation for:

a. A good faith complaint, by or in behalf of the tenant, to a governmental authority of the landlord's alleged violation of any health or safety law, regulation, code, or ordinance, or any law or regulation which has as its objective the regulation of premises used for dwelling purposes or which pertains to the offense of rent gouging in the third, second or first degree; or

b. Actions taken in good faith, by or in behalf of the tenant, to secure or enforce any rights under the lease or rental agreement, under ~~section two hundred twenty-five-d~~ of this chapter, or under any other law of the state of New York, or of its governmental subdivisions, or of the United States which has as its objective the regulation of premises used for dwelling purposes or which pertains to the offense of rent gouging in the third, second or first degree; or

c. The tenant's participation in the activities of a tenant's organization.

2. No landlord or premises or units to which this section is applicable shall substantially alter the terms of the tenancy in retaliation for any actions set forth in paragraphs a, b, and c of subdivision one of this section. Substantial alteration shall include, but is not limited to, the refusal to continue a tenancy of the tenant or, upon expiration of the tenant's lease, to renew the lease or offer a new lease; provided, however, that a landlord shall not be required under this section to offer a new lease or a lease renewal for a term greater than one year and after such extension of a tenancy for one year shall not be required to further extend or continue such tenancy.

3. A landlord shall be subject to a civil action for damages and other appropriate relief, including injunctive and other equitable remedies, as may be determined by a court of competent jurisdiction in any case in which the landlord has violated the provisions of this section.

4. In any action to recover real property or summary proceeding to recover possession of real property, judgment shall be entered for the tenant if the court finds that the landlord is acting in retaliation for any action set forth in paragraphs a, b, and c of subdivision one of this section and further finds that the landlord would not otherwise have commenced such action or proceeding. Retaliation shall be asserted as an affirmative defense in such action or proceeding. The tenant shall not be relieved of the obligation to pay any rent for which he is otherwise liable.

5. In an action or proceeding instituted against a tenant of premises or a unit to which this section is applicable, a rebuttable presumption that the landlord is acting in retaliation shall be created if the tenant establishes that the landlord served a notice to quit, or instituted an action or proceeding to recover possession, or attempted to substantially alter the terms of the tenancy, within six months after:

a. A good faith complaint was made, by or in behalf of the tenant, to a governmental authority of the landlord's violation of any health or safety law, regulation, code, or ordinance, or any law or regulation which has as its objective the regulation of premises used for dwelling purposes or which pertains to the offense of rent gouging in the third, second or first degree; or

b. The tenant in good faith commenced an action or proceeding in a court or administrative body of competent jurisdiction to secure or enforce against the landlord or his agents any rights under the lease or rental agreement, under ~~section two hundred twenty-five-b~~ of this chapter, or under any other law of the state of New York, or of its governmental subdivisions, or of the United States which has as its objective the regulation of premises used for dwelling purposes or which pertains to the offense of rent gouging in the third, second or first degree.

c. Judgment under subdivision three or four of this section was entered for the tenant in a previous action between the parties; or an inspection was made, an order was entered, or other action was taken as a result of a complaint or act described in paragraph a or b of this subdivision.

But the presumption shall not apply in an action or proceeding based on the violation by the tenant of the terms and conditions of the lease or rental agreement, including nonpayment of the agreed-upon rent.

The effect of the presumption shall be to require the landlord to provide a credible explanation of a non-retaliatory motive for his acts. Such an explanation shall overcome and remove the presumption unless the tenant disproves it by a preponderance of the evidence.

5-a. Any lease provision which seeks to assess a fee, penalty or dollar charge, in addition to the stated rent, against a tenant because such tenant files a bona fide complaint with a building code officer regarding the condition of such tenant's leased premises shall be null and void as being against public policy. A landlord who seeks to enforce such a fee, penalty or charge shall be liable to the tenant for triple the amount of such fee, penalty or charge.

6. This section shall apply to all rental residential premises except owner-occupied dwellings with less than four units. However, its provisions shall not be given effect in any case in which it is established that the condition from which the complaint or action arose was caused by the tenant, a member of the tenant's household, or a guest of the tenant. Nor shall it apply in a case where a tenancy was terminated pursuant to the terms of a lease as a result of a bona fide transfer of ownership.

Also worth including is RPL 230 which protects the rights of tenants to join and participate in tenant associations:

1. No landlord shall interfere with the right of a tenant to form, join or participate in the lawful activities of any group, committee or other organization formed to protect the rights of tenants; nor shall any landlord harass, punish, penalize, diminish, or withhold any right, benefit or privilege of a tenant under his tenancy for exercising such right.

2. Tenants' groups, committees or other tenants' organizations shall have the right to meet without being required to pay a fee in any location on the premises including a community or social room where use is normally subject to a fee which is devoted to the common use of all tenants in a peaceful manner, at reasonable hours and without obstructing access to the premises or facilities. No landlord shall deny such right.