

BELDEN SAWYER TENANT ASSOCIATION

LOCAL 1

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MILLARD REFUSES TO NEGOTIATE WITH TENANT UNION; MEMBERS AUTHORIZE HISTORIC RENT STRIKE

CHICAGO – On Sunday, the Belden Sawyer Tenant Association, Local 1, voted to authorize a rent strike which will begin on March 1, 2025, unless landlord Drew Millard negotiates in good faith with the union by February 28, 2025.

BSTA Local 1 formed in December 2024, in response to the crisis of residents' building being bought by Millard's investment firm Concord Capital. Prior to that date, the building was owned by a small landlord who offered reasonable rents to tenants, some of whom have lived in the building for nearly thirty years. Millard plans to remove 16 families from the building so that he can begin extensive luxury renovations and raise rent by one hundred percent.

Millard's plan comes in the midst of a housing crisis which is sweeping Chicago. Rents, home prices, and property taxes are spiraling upward and thousands of families are being displaced from their homes due to the predatory practices of landlord-developers like Millard. Meanwhile, homelessness rates are soaring; from 2023 to 2024, according to city data, homelessness increased by roughly two hundred percent.

On its website, Concord Capital boasts that it intends to acquire 650 units in the coming year, which will result in mass displacement and rent gouging in this portfolio alone. According to the site, "Chicago's affordable rent per square foot and strong middle-market multifamily sector offer significant growth potential." In other words, the company aims to further displace working tenants across the city, in order to inflate the cost per square foot of the units they can no longer afford to inhabit.

"People like Drew Millard view housing as a thing to hoard in a portfolio," said resident Tory deMartelly. "We are here to remind him and others like him that these properties have actual people living in them, who deserve the right to negotiate fair housing contracts. Individually, they can ignore us. As tenant unions, they cannot."

"This crisis is not new, and it is not restricted to our building," said resident David Amato. "Working class communities and particularly communities of color have been ravaged by aggressive real estate tactics for decades, resulting in traumatic displacement of families and destabilization of communities."

Since December, the union has attempted to meet with Millard and his designated property management firm 33 Realty, which he founded in 2009 and sold in 2022, to negotiate lease terms which would allow members to stay in their homes. Using the democratic process, the union passed the following demands:

- Annual one-year lease renewals
- Reasonable, negotiated rent
- No unnecessary renovations to units

These requests have been ignored. Instead, Millard has informed the union that his final offer is to raise rent by roughly twenty-five percent in the short term and allow members to stay through October 2025. At that point, they must leave.

Millard has accused the union of defamation, tortious interference, harassment, and incitement of violence. Union members have condemned these claims as outrageous, slanderous, retaliatory, and unequivocally false.

BSTA Local 1 has received strong support from local elected officials, including Alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, Cook County Commissioner Anthony Quezada, State Senator Graciela Guzmán, and State Representative Will Guzzardi.

Should Millard meet with the union by February 28, 2025, and negotiate fair lease terms in good faith at a neutral location, the strike will be called off. Residents do not take the prospect of a strike lightly, and understand that the move comes at great personal and legal risk. However, members feel that Millard has left them with no other choice.

BSTA Local 1 is calling on all tenants in 33 Realty properties and properties owned by Drew Millard to stand with them, organize, and join the strike. Together, tenants can save their homes and protect their neighborhoods from unscrupulous, profit-hungry developers. Housing is a human right. All power to all tenants. The union forever.

For more information, contact BSTA Local 1 