



**SOMERFORD
GROVE
RENTERS**

**LONDON
RENTERS
UNION**

Renters win £18k in David versus Goliath Battle with Billionaire Landlord Who Evicted Them During Pandemic

- Representatives of billionaire landlord John Christodolou previously told tenants impacted by coronavirus to use their unspent lunch money to cover rent, causing national outrage.
- After being evicted for speaking out, tenants took their landlord to court - and won.
- The landmark case is the first of several to be filed by Somerford Grove Renters, with an estimated half million in claims against Christodoulou. It will empower tenants across the UK to claim Rent Repayment Orders.

On Wednesday 21 July 2021, four members of Somerford Grove Renters received a Decision from the UK's First Tier Tribunal awarding them £18,420.96 (8 months' rent) for their landlord's failure to obtain House of Multiple Occupancy licenses. The renters lived in a flat owned by billionaire landlord John Christodoulou and were evicted earlier this year in retaliation for organising with their neighbours to seek fair rent terms and maintenance during the pandemic.

Somerford Grove Renters (SGR) is a tenants' group representing 170 flats in Olympic House, Simpson House and St John's Court in Hackney, all buildings

majority-owned by Christodolou, and a part of the London Renters Union (LRU), a group of over 4,000 renters across the capital.

At the start of the pandemic, SGR wrote to the lettings agent that represents Christodolou, Tower Quay, asking for a rent reduction. In their response, Tower Quay [told](#) the tenants to use their unspent lunch money and holiday savings to pay their rent in full, inviting [criticism from London Mayor Sadiq Khan](#).

SGR since repeated their demands in an open letter that garnered over 500 signatures, and held a demonstration outside Christodoulou's 5-star hotel, the Canary Wharf Riverside Plaza, with speeches from Apsana Begum MP, and organisers with the LRU, Momentum, Socialist Alternative, and other allies. The campaign has received support from [John McDonnell MP](#), [Zarah Sultana MP](#), and [Diane Abbott MP](#), who filed an [Early Day Motion](#) in Parliament on the issue.

Throughout the campaign, Tower Quay has deployed a number of intimidatory tactics to crack down on tenants' efforts to organise. They sent legal threats to a number of organisers, and attempted to surveil tenants, instructing security guards to follow residents, and infiltrating the tenants' WhatsApp group. Several organisers have been served eviction notices.

The tenants suspected that their block was not correctly licensed and asked Hackney Council to conduct investigations on the property.. Hackney confirmed that the landlord had not obtained required House of Multiple Occupation licenses for the block, which presented a significant fire safety hazard and made tenants eligible to claim up to 12 months of rent back as compensation for the offense. SGR decided to run a test case, with four evicted tenants bringing a Rent Repayment Order to the First Tier Tribunal. The case received evidence and support from Hackney Council's Private Rented Sector Team.

Now that they have received the successful Decision, SGR will be filing approximately fifty additional cases for tenants in the block, representing around half a million pounds in claims.

The group meets weekly to assemble RRO applications. In return for the group's assistance, RRO applicants are asked to donate a proportion of any winnings to a community fund.

John Christodolou, currently 82nd on the Sunday Times Rich List, enjoys his £1.8bn fortune from the tax haven of Monaco. As well as one other five-star hotel and a \$50m superyacht, Mr Christodolou owns the Yianis Christodoulou Foundation, a charity that recently delivered [food parcels](#) to homeless people in Liverpool and Manchester.

Marc Sutton, a lead SGR organiser, said:

“Our billionaire landlord responded to a request for a rent reduction by those of us who have lost income due to the pandemic by issuing eviction notices. After a year of campaigning and fighting, we are thrilled to have achieved such a major win, the first of many more to come.

People doubted that we had a chance against such a rich and powerful landlord. It’s a David versus Goliath battle. But we’ve found strength through the community and solidarity that we’ve built together.”

“Being worried about losing your home during a pandemic has had an enormous impact on the wellbeing of many of us living at Somerford Grove. Our situation shows the government has left renters to fend for themselves.”

Moritz Herle, a member of the London Renters Union:

“By getting organised and taking action together, LRU members at Somerford Grove have helped keep each other safe during the pandemic and won this significant financial victory. The message to landlords is clear: if you try to bully us out of our rights to affordable and safe housing during a pandemic, we’ll do everything we can to hold you to account.”

“Tenants at Somerford Grove followed government guidance and asked their landlord for a rent reduction - one that would cost him 0.04% of his wealth - and he has responded with a campaign of intimidation.

“It is laughable that John Christodolou takes pride in delivering food to the homeless, while threatening his tenants with homelessness during a pandemic.”

"The government must act now to avoid breaking its promise that no renter will be forced out of their home during the pandemic."

"If ministers want to show that it cares more about public health than the profits of landlords, they should introduce a permanent evictions ban and cancel rent debt."

Andrew Scattergood, Momentum co-chair:

"Throughout this pandemic, the wealth of billionaires has skyrocketed as working people have suffered. But this victory is proof that we can fight back. It's time for workers and renters to get organised and start taking on this parasitic ruling class. We've had enough of exploitation."

Photos are available at <https://somerfordgroverenters.com/photos>

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