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Bronx tenants boo landlord and call for rent freeze at raucous meeting

 BY DENIS SLATTERY [FOLLOW](#)

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Full house at Hostos Community College in the Bronx for the Rent Guidelines Board public hearing. More than 100 tenants testified that they would like to see a rent freeze. (DENIS SLATTERY)

Chanting "slumlord" and calling on a citywide rent freeze, hundreds of tenants shouted down one brave landlord willing to appear at a Rent Guidelines Board hearing Thursday.

"People are struggling," said Shanequa Charles, 34, one of more than 350 rent stabilized tenants at Hostos College for the first of four hearings leading up to a June 23 vote on rent increases.

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're in the wrong,"

The one man was Shpend Nezaj, a landlord from Pelham Bay and a member of the Rent Stabilization Association — a group that rolled out a six-figure landlord-backed advertising blitz calling for rent increases last week.

"I don't think that all of the tenants realize the cost that building owners incur," Nezaj said after asking the board for a minimum 3% increase. "Maybe one day when they own their own home they will understand the expense."



Shpend Nezaj, a Bronx landlord, was the only person to testify for a rent increase at the Rent Guidelines Board public meeting in the Bronx. (DENIS SLATTERY)

Last month, the Rent Guidelines Board said it would consider anywhere from zero to 3% hikes on one-year leases that start Oct. 1, and 0.5% to 4.5% on two-year leases.

"It should be zero," said Melida Martin, 66, who is facing eviction from her Sheridan Ave. apartment after a change in landlords. "I don't feel that they deserve a hike in rent when people can barely afford what they pay now."

Vanessa Gibson, the lone City Council representative at the meeting, said she could see both sides of the fight — but was siding with the tenants.

"I respect our landlords and our building owners," Gibson said. "But then I hear these horror stories and it just makes sense. This is a very unique opportunity where we could potentially have a rent freeze."