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Owners of Morrison Hotel Sentenced to Probation; Must Control Vermin, Relocate Tenants or Face Jail

Slumlords, Convicted on 21 Counts, Must Show Compliance By March 3

LOS ANGELES – A Los Angeles Superior Court Judge today sentenced the owners of the Morrison Hotel to five years probation and ordered them to control vermin infestation and assure the relocation of the remaining residents at the property or face 120 days in jail. They are to present evidence of compliance with the sentencing terms on March 3.

Brothers Sauli Danpour, 48, and Henry Danpour, 53, and two of their businesses were convicted last month on 21 counts alleging they willfully violated sections of the City's Fire and Housing Code and the County's Health Code at the Morrison, 1246 S. Hope St. Calling the suspended jail sentence a "sword of Damocles" hanging over their heads, Judge Bernard Kemper also ordered the Danpours and their two business entities to pay more than \$120,000 in fines and penalties. Investigative costs will also be tallied and added to the total penalty.

City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo, who had urged the court last month to sentence the two men to jail or to house arrest at the Morrison as part of their sentence, said the Danpours should have been dealt a harsher sentence.

"Henry and Sauli Danpour gambled with the lives of their tenants and won," Delgadillo said. "The financial penalties imposed are significant, but the only way to bring an end to this sort of willful disregard of our housing laws is to send slumlords to jail. The tenants here are the ones who have paid the biggest penalty, and that is simply unjust."

The Morrison Hotel is a four-story residential hotel with 116 units. The case against its owners began in Spring 2004 with inspections by the Inter-Agency Housing Task Force, whose members included representatives of the city's fire and building and safety departments and the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services. Following multiple inspections, the owners were informed of the existence of approximately 100 violations, including a lack of heat in the building, locked fire doors, vermin and insect infestation as well as an inoperable fire suppression system.

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A criminal complaint was filed by the City Attorney's Housing Enforcement Unit in November 2004 after the owners repeatedly failed to bring the building into compliance. Following a four-day bench trial, Judge Kemper found the four defendants guilty on 21 counts. Tenants of the building, organized by Strategic Action for a Just Economy (SAJE), aided in the investigations and are engaged in a civil suit with the owners.

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