

**CEA's response: Property agents must comply with relevant laws
19 Sep 2019**

We refer to Ms Ng Poh Leng's letter (Protect landlords and tenants from unscrupulous real estate agents, Sept 16).

The Council for Estate Agencies (CEA) takes a serious view of property agents who do not act responsibly and professionally.

Under CEA's Code of Ethics and Professional Client Care (CEPCC), property agents must abide by the relevant laws that apply to property transactions, and are obliged to protect and promote the interests of their clients.

These include the rules and regulations on the letting out of HDB flats. CEA will not hesitate to take disciplinary actions against agents who breach the CEPCC.

CEA has contacted Ms Ng to understand the details of her case for our investigation.

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Council for Estate Agencies

Letter to ST Forum

Protect landlords and tenants from unscrupulous real estate agent

Date: 16 Sep 2019

From: Ng Poh Leng

The Government has been encouraging the elderly to use their flat to finance their retirement. And my mother did precisely that by renting out her four-room Housing Board flat.

Through an agent from a well-known real estate agency, we found six foreign workers as tenants.

Months later, an HDB officer called and said neighbours had complained about many people going in and out of my mother's flat.

The agent went with the HDB officer to do a spot check on Sept 2.

After the spot check, the agent sent us photos to show that our flat was all right, and said that he had given the tenants a stern warning. We were thankful to him for disciplining the tenants and thought the episode was over.

On Sept 12, the HDB officer called again to say our neighbour had sent him closed-circuit television footage of the agent removing partitions about two hours before the scheduled time for the spot check, and bringing the partitions back later.

In the evening of the same day, we went to the flat to do a spot check. To our chagrin, the door lock had been changed, so we called the police.

When we finally managed to get in, we saw that there were many partitions in the living room, the kitchen was messy, and even the storeroom had been cleared to put in a bed.

The police rounded up all the occupants - there were 12 in total when the legal limit is six. Only three were legal tenants registered with HDB.

When the police asked them how they secured our home, they replied that they had seen a rental ad.

How many landlords have been victimised by such unscrupulous agents? How many foreign workers have been lured by such online ads that sublet our highly subsidised public housing?

One police officer even told us that he had come across a five-room flat that was sublet to more than 20 tenants.

After the tenants are evicted, my mum will have to spend money to tidy up and repair the flat on top of the loss of rental income. Will the real estate agency get the agent to compensate my mum?

Perhaps property agents should be made to pay a deposit so that victimised clients can claim for damages. The deposit should be substantial enough to serve as a deterrent.