

ATLANTA

# ‘This is stealing’ Channel 2 goes undercover as Instagram account lets you squat in metro homes

By [Justin Gray, WSB-TV](#) February 05, 2024 at 6:04 pm EST



At first glance, it looks like a legitimate real estate listing. But Channel 2 went undercover as an Instagram account and discovered that this is stealing. Channel 2 goes undercover as an Instagram account lets you squat in metro homes. ATLANTA — A one-time payment and the home is yours.

There's no mortgage or rent, that's the deal being advertised on Instagram.

The catch is that you become a criminal – a squatter.

The account states clearly they have no legal right to these homes.

So, **Channel 2 Action News** sent hidden cameras and a **Channel 2** producer in to see what really happens when you show interest in a squatter home.

At first glance, it looks just like another real estate pro hustling to rent homes on social media.

But at 1 Time Payment Homes, the site makes it clear these are squatter homes and spells out just what that means in a pinned Insta story.

“The company’s owners will come out, so will the police. The police will tell you there’s nothing they can do about it -- squatters rights,” our **Channel 2** producer J.P. read off the Instagram account.

“This is a criminal act. This is stealing and needs to be looked at that way,” said a property owner who asked only to be identified as David.

Property owners and managers say the squatting problem has exploded over the past year in metro Atlanta.

“It’s like I gave away \$200,000, I feel,” homeowner Michael Holmes said.

Holmes told **Channel 2 consumer investigator Justin Gray** that he used his life savings to buy a DeKalb County home out of foreclosure eight months ago as a rental property.

“It’s been a nightmare,” Holmes said.

The alleged squatter living inside has filed more than 30 motions in court to tie up Holmes’ efforts to get him out.

“If I can’t bring this to some type of resolution, I’ll be in jeopardy of filing bankruptcy,” Holmes said.

1timePaymentHomes is running a New Year’s special: \$1,400 for keys and a lease so as a squatter you can “stack money and turn ya life around.”

“It makes you feel like, ‘Why do you play by the rules if everyone doesn’t have to?’” Holmes said.

To see how it worked we sent **Channel 2** producer J.P. undercover.

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“You’re just going to say, ‘I saw your post on Instagram, I’m curious how this process works, OK?’” Gray told J.P.

J.P. exchanged a series of messages with 1TimePaymentHomes over the course of a week and paid his \$500 through Apple Pay.

That’s when we were told to take our pick of any home posted on the real estate website Rently.

The CEO of the National Rental Home Council, David Howard, said Atlanta is seeing more squatters than anywhere else in the nation.

“We’re seeing situations of trespassing in Atlanta that we’re not seeing anywhere else in this country, in terms of scale,” Howard said.

We settled on a home in Union City, but on the day of the meetup were told it was off-market.

1TimePaymentHomes said they do have keys for a house nearby managed by Progress Residential and also posted on Rently.

We were told to meet at a gas station to exchange the rest of our 1TimePaymentHomes for keys, then we’d get an email with the lease.

But the meetup lasted only seconds.

“So how does all this work?” J.P. asked the representative from 1TimePaymentHomes.

“So, basically, I’m going to get you the keys or whatever the case may be,” the person told J.P.

Then they said they would be right back.

As soon as they saw our **Channel 2 Action News** camera coming, the 1 Time Payment Homes representative took off running.

“Hey sir, it’s Justin Gray with **Channel 2**. Are you selling a squatter home right here? You got the keys? Did you talk to J.P. about the keys?” Gray asked the representative as they took off in a car.

But that wasn’t the end of the Instagram account. They are still offering move-in deals.

“The person that designed that business, if you want to call it a business, is a criminal,” David said.

**Channel 2 Action News** has reported on multiple squatter horror stories in the past 12 months.

Like [when a squatter moved into Army Col. Dalia Daure’s DeKalb home](#) while she was on active duty.

“I was beside myself and I felt violated,” Dure said.

Police eventually pulled guns and drugs out of her house when they arrested the squatter, and served an intruder affidavit, bypassing the regular court eviction process.

Property owners say for the problem to stop, courts need to consider squatting as theft -- a crime -- not a run-of-the-mill eviction case.

“We need to talk about this for what it is. This is criminal trespassing. It’s a law enforcement issue,” Howard said.

Progress Residential owns the home we were offered keys to.

Progress told us in a statement:

*“We have been monitoring this Instagram account for some time and continue to appeal for its removal.*

*“Trespassing is a criminal activity that has a negative impact on entire communities. The Progress Residential team has implemented a number of proactive strategies to address this issue and works closely with local law enforcement to recover homes from trespassers.”*

We also spoke with a representative from Main Street Renewal, who manages the first home we were offered. They told **Channel 2 Action News** that they sent the Instagram account a cease-and-desist order and reported the account.

Rently also sent us a statement, saying:

*“Rently stands as the industry leader by taking proactive steps to prevent scams from occurring on our platform. We have established a dedicated security team tasked with investigating potential scams and safeguarding the interests of our users.”*

The Instagram account remains active and did not respond to Gray’s DM’s asking for comment.