

If you're 60 or over, call your local legal aid office:

Eastern CT	800-413-7796	Western CT	800-413-7797
Hartford Area	860-541-5000	Bridgeport Area	800-809-4434
Stamford Area	800-541-8909	New Haven Area	203-946-4811

If you're under 60, call SLS for help:



Statewide Legal Services
1-800-453-3320
860-344-0380

Search our website for help:



www.ctlawhelp.org

HOUSING

LEGAL SERVICES

SELF-HELP SERIES

Renters Have Legal Rights

May 2017



We offer free legal help in many areas, including

- welfare,
- SNAP (food stamps),
- divorce,
- child support,
- domestic violence,
- bankruptcy,
- special education,
- nursing home care,
- health insurance,
- eviction,
- foreclosure,
- and more.

See the reverse side for more about legal services.

All renters (also called tenants) have legal rights. You have these rights even if

- you do not have a written lease agreement,
- you signed an agreement, or
- you told your landlord you will give up your rights.

This booklet tells you about your rights and responsibilities as a renter.

Your landlord must:

1. Follow all health and safety laws so that the building, apartments, and common areas are safe. Common areas include the driveway, yard, halls, and laundry rooms.
2. Make all repairs needed to keep your apartment fit and livable.
3. Keep all electrical, plumbing, heating, ventilation, appliances, and other landlord-supplied features (such as elevators and appliances) working and safe.
4. Provide containers for trash and arrange for its removal.
5. Supply heat, running water, and hot water. (A landlord may require to you to pay for gas, oil, electricity, or water.)
6. Repair cracked, chipped, or peeling paint and remove paint that contains dangerous and illegal amounts of lead. Lead is very dangerous for small children and pregnant women. To learn more, see *Lead Poisoning* below. And call your Health Department if you are worried about lead in your apartment.

If your landlord does not do one or more of these things, you have the right to complain to your town's housing code enforcement agency. If repairs are still not made after you complain, you may sue your landlord, pay your rent to the court, and ask the court to order a refund. For more information, see the legal aid booklet: *Tenants' Rights: Repairs*.

Warning! Do not stop paying your rent until the court decides your case.

If you're under 60, call us for help:

 **Statewide Legal Services**
1-800-453-3320 or 860-344-0380

Search our website for help:

 www.ctlawhelp.org

If you're over 60, call your local legal aid office.

Connecticut Legal Services	Greater Hartford Legal Aid
www.ctlegal.org	www.ghla.org
Bridgeport 1000 Lafayette Blvd Suite 950 203-336-3851	999 Asylum Avenue Hartford, CT 06105 860-541-5000
New Britain 16 Main Street 860-225-8678	New Haven Legal Assistance Association
New London 125 Eugene O'Neill Dr. Suite 120 860-447-0323	www.nhlegal.org 426 State Street New Haven, CT 06510 203-946-4811
Stamford 20 Summer Street 203-348-9216	Consumer Law Project for Elders
Waterbury 85 Central Avenue 203-756-8074	Free legal assistance to people 60 and over throughout Connecticut who have money/debt problems. 1-800-296-1467
Willimantic 1125 Main Street 860-456-1761	

This booklet was produced by Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, and Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut. The information in this booklet is based on laws in Connecticut as of 5/2017. We hope that the information is helpful. It is not intended as legal advice. For advice on your situation, call Statewide Legal Services or contact a lawyer.

What should I do if I think I was discriminated against?

Keep a record of all phone calls and meetings. Write down

- the dates, times, meeting places, and people involved (names and job titles if you know them);
- what happened, what was said, and who said it;
- the reason you were turned down;
- the address of the apartment/house and the type of building; and
- the names and addresses of any witnesses.

Save all your papers or documents related to the unfair housing treatment, such as

- letters, e-mails, and voicemails;
- applications and receipts;
- notices;
- business cards; and
- lease agreements.

Where can I get legal help?

You can call the following agencies for advice, information and help filing a complaint. But contact them soon. Discrimination cases must usually be filed within 180 days. The longer you wait, the harder it may be to find witnesses who remember what happened and documents that support your case.

Connecticut Fair Housing Center

860-247-4400 or 888-247-4401

Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities (CHRO)

CHRO Fair Housing Unit

860-541-3403 or 800-477-5737, ext. 3403

TDD: 860-541-3459

Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut

860-344-0380 or 800-453-3320

You, the renter, must:

1. Follow all housing and fire codes that apply to you.
2. Keep your apartment as clean and safe as possible, including sinks, toilets, tubs, and appliances.
3. Put all trash in the containers supplied by the landlord.
4. Use all services and facilities (such as the elevator, laundry room, and heating) reasonably.
5. Not destroy, damage, or take any property or allow anyone else to do so. You may have to pay the landlord if you, your family, or your guests cause damage that is more than normal wear and tear.
6. Not disturb your neighbors or allow any of your guests to do so.
7. Obey the landlord's rules if they are reasonable, clear, apply to all tenants, and you were told about them.
8. Pay the rent, even if your apartment needs repairs, unless the court says otherwise. For more information, see the legal aid booklet: *Tenants' Rights: Repairs*.
9. Let the landlord into your apartment if the request to go in is reasonable. To learn more, see *Privacy* below.

Privacy

Your landlord **can** go into your apartment if there is a good reason **and** he or she

- lets you know in advance (in writing or by telling you);
- wants to go in at a reasonable time of day; and/or
- wants to go in to do needed repairs or inspection, or to show the apartment to potential buyers, tenants, or contractors/workers.

Your landlord must never go into your apartment without your permission unless

- there is a real emergency, like water leaking into the apartment below yours,
- the landlord has a court order that says he can go in, or
- you have abandoned the apartment and moved out.

Your landlord can never go into your apartment to harass or bother you. If he or she does, call the police and file a complaint.

Paying Your Rent

Month-to-month renters should pay by check or money order by the 10th of each month. The deadline for week-to-week renters is the 5th day of each week.

If you do not pay by the deadline, the landlord can charge a late fee. Landlords are not allowed to offer a discount if you pay before the deadline.

Always write these words on your check or money order: "Rent in full for the month (or week) of _____."

Keep good records. Your cancelled check or copy of your money order is your receipt.

Avoid paying cash. If you pay cash, the landlord must give you a receipt that says the date, the amount, and what the payment is for.

Evictions

Unless your landlord has a legal court order to evict you, you can stay in your apartment. Even if a bank is foreclosing on your landlord's property, you have the right to stay there.

People with Disabilities Have Extra Rights

You have the right to make changes to the apartment whenever you need them. For example, you may need ramps or bathroom grab bars.

The landlord has the right to ask you to prove that you need the changes, but you do not have to provide any medical records or information about your disability. The **only** information you have to give is to say

- you have a disability, and
- your doctor thinks you need those changes to be able to live in the apartment.

You may have to agree to

- remove the change before you move out, and
- pay for the change yourself.

Landlords must be flexible with the rules so you can use your apartment just like other tenants. For example, a landlord must allow you to have a service animal even if pets are not allowed. But the landlord does not have to agree to the change if it would be very expensive or unreasonable.

You can get help at the Connecticut Fair Housing Center website with writing a letter to your landlord asking for a *reasonable accommodation* for your disability. Go to www.ctfairhousing.org/raletters.

What should I do if I think I was discriminated against?

Keep a record of all phone calls and meetings and save all your papers or documents related to the unfair housing treatment.

How do I know if I am a victim of discrimination?

Discrimination happens in many ways. It is usually hidden, but you may feel that you're being treated differently. Here are some examples of housing discrimination:

Race, color, or national origin:	<p>If a landlord, rental agent, or realtor only shows you apartments or homes in areas where most people look like you.</p> <p>If a sign says "For Rent," but the landlord says it is already rented.</p>
Renters with children:	<p>If you have children, are pregnant or adopting, or will have custody of a child and the landlord says you must pay higher rent, a security deposit, or extra deposit than tenants without children, or that you can only live on a certain floor of the building.</p>
Public assistance, child support, or spousal support:	<p>If a landlord</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • says they don't take Section 8 renters, • says they want cash instead of the state security deposit guarantee, or • makes you fill out more paperwork than other renters.
Disabilities:	<p>If you or a family member have (or seem to have) a physical or mental disability and the landlord says</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you can't live there because there is no one to take care of you; • they would like to rent to you, but their insurance will go up; • they don't rent to alcoholics or drug addicts, even if they're in recovery programs; or • they need your medical records.

For more information about evictions and your rights if your landlord is or was in foreclosure, see these legal aid booklets:

- *Evictions and Lockouts*
- *Is Your Landlord In Foreclosure?*
- *Was Your Landlord Foreclosed?*

Rules

The rules must be the **same** for all tenants.

A landlord can refuse to rent to you if

- you do not have enough income to afford the rent;
- you were evicted before because you destroyed property or did not pay the rent; or
- there is a no pets policy and you have a pet (unless you have a disability and need a service animal).

A landlord can require all renters to

- give credit references;
- pay a security deposit of up to 2 months' rent, or up to 1 month's rent if you are 62 or over;
- give references from former landlords; and
- pass a criminal background check.

Retaliation

It is illegal for your landlord to evict you or raise your rent if in the last 6 months you

- asked your landlord to fix your apartment;
- Complained to the health department, housing code office, or the Fair Rent Commission; or
- joined a tenants' union.

Lockouts

It is against the law for your landlord to

- change the locks on your apartment,
- keep your belongings, or
- do anything else to keep you out of your apartment.

If your landlord locks you out, call the police and ask them to let you back in. It is illegal for the landlord to lock you out even if you owe money.

For more information, see the booklet: *Evictions and Lockouts*.

Utilities

Your landlord **must not** interfere with your utilities, including gas, electricity, heat, and hot water. If he or she does, call the police. The police may arrest your landlord if he or she does not get the utilities turned back on.

For more information, see the legal aid booklet: *Utility Problems with Landlords*.

Security Deposits

Before you move into an apartment, the landlord can ask you to pay the first month's rent and a security deposit equal to up to 2 months of your rent.

Seniors: If you are 62 year or over, the landlord cannot charge you more than 1 month's rent for the security deposit.

For more information, see the legal aid booklet: *Security Deposits and Rent Increases*.

Lead Poisoning

Lead is very dangerous for children under 6 and pregnant women and their babies. Lead can cause serious health problems, such as

- mental retardation and learning disabilities;
- vision, hearing, growth, and behavior problems; and
- death.

There may be lead in the paint, paint dust, toys, or dishes in your home or apartment.

All children under 6 are tested for lead at least once a year by their doctor. If the test shows high levels of lead, the doctor will tell the Department of Health. The Department of Health will come to your home and work with you and your landlord. If you are worried about lead poisoning, contact your child's doctor or call **2-1-1**.

Discrimination

Whether you are renting or buying a home, you have the right to choose where you live. It is **illegal** for a landlord to refuse to rent to you or treat you differently because of your

- race, religion, national origin, or color;
- family (if you have children or are married or single);
- sexual orientation or gender identity; or
- disability.

It is also illegal to treat you differently because you get Section 8 or other assistance to help you pay the rent. This illegal treatment is discrimination.

A landlord **can** refuse to rent to you if you

- have bad credit,
- were evicted from another apartment, or
- have a criminal record.