

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

October 2023



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 or you told your landlord you would give up your rights.

This booklet explains your rights and responsibilities as a renter.

Things the landlord must do:

- 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.
- Make all repairs needed to keep your apartment safe and livable.
- Ensure that electrical, plumbing, heating, ventilation, appliances, and elevators are working and safe.
- Provide containers for trash and arrange for trash removal.
- Supply heat, running water, and hot water. (A landlord may require to you to pay for gas, oil, electricity, or water.)
- 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 people who are pregnant. Call your City's Health Department if you are worried about lead in your apartment. To learn more, see *Are You Worried About Lead Poisoning?*

If your landlord does not keep your apartment safe and in working order, you have the right to complain to your town's housing code enforcement agency. If repairs still are not made after you complain, you can file a case in court and pay your rent to the court. You can also ask the court to order repairs and a refund of your rent. See the legal aid booklet, *Tenants' Rights: Repairs*.

Things that you must do as a tenant:

- Follow all housing and fire codes that apply to you.
- Keep your apartment clean and safe.
- Put all trash in the appropriate containers.

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

www.ctlegal.org

Bridgeport

1000 Lafayette Blvd Suite 950 203-336-3851

New Britain

16 Main Street 860-225-8678

New London

125 Eugene O'Neill Dr. Suite 120 860-447-0323

Stamford

1177 Summer Street 203-348-9216

Waterbury

85 Central Avenue 203-756-8074

Willimantic

1125 Main Street 860-456-1761

Greater Hartford Legal Aid

www.ghla.org

999 Asylum Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105
860-541-5000

New Haven Legal Assistance Association

www.nhlegal.org

205 Orange Street
New Haven, CT 06510
203-946-4811

Consumer Law Project for Elders

Free legal assistance to people 60 and over throughout Connecticut who have money/debt problems.

1-800-296-1467

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 10/2023. 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 someone has discriminated against me?

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

- The dates, times, meeting places, and people involved (including names and job titles, if possible).
- 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.
- The names and addresses of any witnesses. Save all your papers or documents related to the unfair housing treatment, such as letters, texts, 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
221 Main Street, Suite 401
Hartford, CT 06106
860-247-4400
888-247-4401

Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities (CHRO)
CHRO Fair Housing Unit
21 Grand St., Hartford, CT 06106
860-541-3403
800-477-5737, ext. 3403
TDD: 860-541-3459

- Use all services and equipment, such as the elevator, laundry room, and heating, reasonably.
- Do not destroy, damage, or take any property or allow anyone else to do so. If you, your family, or your guests cause damage beyond normal wear and tear, you may have to pay for repairs or the landlord may keep some or all of your security deposit.
- Take responsibility your guests' actions when they visit you. For example, if there is no smoking your building, you could be held responsible if your guest smokes.
- Not disturb your neighbors or allow any of your guests to do so.
- Obey the landlord's rules if they are reasonable, clear, apply to all tenants, and you were told about them.
- Pay the rent, even if your apartment needs repairs, unless a court says otherwise. For more information, see *Tenants' Rights: Repairs*.
- Allow the landlord to enter your apartment if their request is reasonable.

Can my landlord enter my apartment?

Your landlord cannot enter your apartment without your permission unless there is an emergency or you have been absent from your apartment for a period of time (for example, you were in the hospital). You cannot refuse permission if the landlord has a good reason to enter your apartment. If the landlord wants to enter your apartment, they must:

- tell you in advance;
- enter at a reasonable time of day; and
- have a good reason to enter, such as to make repairs or to show the apartment to potential buyers, tenants, or workers.

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

- there is an emergency, like water leaking into the apartment below yours;

- the landlord has a court order that says they can go in; or
- you have abandoned the apartment and moved out.

Your landlord is not allowed to enter your apartment to harass or bother you. If this happens, call the police and file a complaint.

Rent, Fees, and Security Deposits

Paying Rent

Tenants who pay rent monthly have a 9-day grace period before the rent is considered late. If your rent is due on 1st of each month, and then you must pay rent by the 10th of each month.

The deadline for weekly renters is by the 5th day of each week. If your rent is due each Sunday, then it is considered late if it is not paid by Thursday.

The landlord can charge a fee for late rent, but only if it says so in your lease. You can only be charged the ***smallest*** of these fees:

- up to \$5 per day the rent is late, but not more than \$50 in any month;
- 5% of the amount of the overdue rent; or
- if you get rental assistance, 5% of your share of the rent.

Landlords cannot charge more than one late fee for unpaid rent. Landlords are not allowed to offer a discount if you pay before the deadline.

Always keep good records when you pay rent. If you pay rent through an online portal, take screenshots of everything you do inside the portal. If you pay by check or money order, put in the memo, "Rent in full for the month (or week) of ____." Take a photo of the check or money order before you mail it or put it in a payment box. Keep your canceled check or a copy of your money order as your receipt for rent you paid.

Disabilities

You or a family member have (or seem to have) a physical or mental disability and the landlord says

- 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.

What are my rights as someone who has a disability?

You have the right to make changes to the apartment whenever you need them. This is called a reasonable accommodation. 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 in order to live in the apartment.

You may have to agree to pay for the change yourself or to remove the change before you move out.

If you have a disability, the landlord 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 changes that would be very expensive or unreasonable.

Visit the Connecticut Fair Housing Center website to get help writing a letter to your landlord asking for a reasonable accommodation for your disability.

A landlord can refuse to rent to you for these reasons:

- You don't have enough income to afford the rent or you have bad credit.
- You have been evicted in the past for destroying property or not paying rent.
- You have a criminal record.
- There is a policy against pets and you have one (unless you have a disability and need a service animal).

How do I know if someone is discriminating against me?

Discrimination is usually hidden, but you may feel that you're being treated differently. Here are some examples:

Race, color, or national origin:

- A landlord, rental agent, or realtor only shows you apartments or homes in areas where most people look like you.
- A sign says "For Rent," but the landlord says it is already rented.

Renters with children:

You have children or are pregnant or adopting, or you will have custody of a child and the landlord says you can only live on a certain floor of the building. Or the landlord says you must pay more in rent or your security deposit than tenants without children.

Public assistance, child support, or spousal support:

- A landlord says they don't take Section 8 renters.
- A landlord makes you fill out more paperwork than other renters.

Try to avoid paying your rent cash. If you pay cash, the landlord must give you a receipt with the date, the amount, and what the payment is for.

Rent Increases

If you have a written lease, your landlord can increase your rent at the end of your lease term.

If there is no written lease, the landlord can increase your rent at the beginning of any month.

However, renters have protections if the rent increase is to punish you for complaining to the Housing Code Enforcement agency, or if you are over 62 years of age and live in a building with five or more units.

For more information, see *Tenants' Rights: Rent Increases*.

Security Deposits

Before you move into an apartment, the landlord may ask you to pay the first month's rent and a security deposit. When you move out, the landlord must return all of your deposit (plus interest) unless your apartment was damaged and the damage was your fault. If there is damage to the apartment, the landlord can use some or all of the security deposit to pay for repairs.

For more information, see *Tenants' Rights: Security Deposits*.

Evictions and Lockouts

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. 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. For more information, see these legal aid booklets:

- *Evictions and Lockouts*
- *A Renter's Rights During and After Foreclosure*

Other topics

Rules

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.

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

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.

Utilities

Your landlord must not interfere with your utilities, including gas, electricity, heat, and hot water. If this happens, call the police. Your landlord could be arrested if the utilities are not turned back on.

Any utilities you pay for must be for your use only. You cannot be required to pay for utilities for common areas or for other tenants.

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

Lead Poisoning

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

- learning disabilities and lower IQ scores;
- vision, hearing, growth, speech disorders, hyperactivity, and behavior problems; and
- death.

In Connecticut, all children must be tested for lead poisoning twice before the age of 3. If your child is between 3 and 6 years old and has never been tested for lead, the doctor must test your child. Children less than six years old with developmental delays should also be tested. 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 dial 2-1-1.

See the legal aid booklet, *Are You Worried About Lead Poisoning?*

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 if you are married or not);
- 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.