

NEED HELP?

Call us for help

Statewide
Legal Services
of Connecticut, Inc.

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

February 2013



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 reverse side for more about Legal Services.

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Renters Have Legal Rights

Privacy	5
Paying Your Rent.....	5
Evictions	6
Rules	6
Retaliation	7
Lockouts	7
Utilities	8
Security Deposits	8
Lead Poisoning	8
Discrimination	9
How do I know if am a victim of discrimination?	10
People with disabilities have extra rights	11
What should I do if I think I was discriminated against?	12
Where can I get legal help?	13

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Connecticut Legal Services

www.connlegalservices.org

Bridgeport	
211 State Street	203-336-3851
New Britain	
16 Main Street	860-225-8678
New London	
153 Williams Street	860-447-0323
Stamford	
20 Summer Street	203-348-9216
Waterbury	
85 Central Avenue	203-756-8074
Willimantic	
872 Main Street	860-456-1761

Greater Hartford Legal Aid

www.ghla.org

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

New Haven Legal Assistance Association

www.nhlegal.org

426 State Street 203-946-4811
New Haven, CT 06510

AIDS Legal Network for Connecticut

Free legal information, advice, referrals and more for people throughout CT living with HIV/AIDS.

999 Asylum Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105
860-541-5027 or 1-888-380-3646

Consumer Law Project for Elders

Free legal assistance to seniors 60 and over throughout CT who have consumer problems.

1-800-296-1467

Legal Assistance Resource Center of CT (LARCC)

www.larcc.org

Community education and public policy advocacy organization addressing issues of importance to low-income Connecticut residents.

44 Capitol Avenue, Suite 301
Hartford, CT 06106
860-278-5688

This booklet was produced by the Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut in cooperation with Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, and Statewide Legal Services.

The information in this booklet is based on laws in Connecticut as of 2/2013. 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.

Renters Have Legal Rights

All renters (also called tenants) have legal rights. You have these rights even if you do not have a written lease agreement, or you signed an agreement or told your landlord you will give up your rights. This article tells you renters rights and responsibilities.

Your landlord must:

1. Follow all health and safety laws so 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 heating, running water, and hot water.
6. Repair cracked, chipped, or peeling paint. Remove paint that contains dangerous and illegal amounts of lead. Lead is very dangerous for small children and pregnant women. See the section on Lead Poisoning in this booklet 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 sue your landlord, pay your rent to the court, and ask the court to order a refund. For more information, read our booklet: *If Your Rental Unit Needs Repairs*.

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

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 or your family or 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 all of your landlord's rules if they are reasonable, clear, apply to all tenants, and you were told about the rule(s).
8. Pay the rent, even if your apartment needs repairs, unless the court says otherwise. For more information, see our booklet: *If Your Rental Unit Needs Repairs*.
9. Let the landlord into your apartment, if the request to go in is reasonable. To learn more, see the following section on Privacy.

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

Statewide Legal Services:

Central Connecticut:
860-344-0380

All other areas of Connecticut:
800-453-3320

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
- The names and addresses of any witnesses.

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

- Letters, e-mails, voicemails
- Applications, receipts
- Notices
- Business cards
- Lease agreements

Privacy

Your landlord **can** go into your apartment if he has a good reason **and** he:

- 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.
- You have abandoned the apartment and moved out.

Your landlord can never go into your apartment to harass or bother you. If s/he 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.

Do not pay cash! If you do, 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.

For more information, see our booklets:

- *Eviction*
- *Is Your Landlord Going Through a Foreclosure?*
- *Tenants Don't Have to Move Right Away in a Foreclosure*

Rules

The rules must be the **same** for all tenants. If the rules are the same for everyone, 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
- There is a no pets policy and you have a pet (unless you have a disability and need a service animal)

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.

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 am a victim of discrimination?

Discrimination happens in many ways. It is usually hidden but you may feel you are treated differently.

Here are some examples of housing discrimination:

Race, Color, or National Origin	If a landlord, rental agent, or realtor only shows you apartments or homes in areas where most people look like you. If a sign says “For Rent” but the landlord says it is already rented.
Renters with Children	If you have children, are pregnant or adopting, or will have custody of a child, and the landlord says you must pay a higher rent, security deposit or extra deposit than tenants without children, or that you can only live on a certain floor of the building.
Public Assistance or Child or Spousal Support	If a landlord: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• says he doesn’t take Section 8 renters.• says she wants cash instead of the State security deposit guarantee.• makes you fill out more paperwork than other renters.
Disabilities	If you or a family member have – or seem to have – a physical or mental disability and the landlord says: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• you can’t live here because there is no one to take care of you.• I’d like to rent to you, but my insurance will go up.• we don’t want alcoholics or drug addicts here, even if they’re in recovery programs.• I need your medical records.

A landlord can require all renters to:

- Give credit references
- Pay a security deposit of up to 2 months’ rent (up to 1 month’s rent if you are 62 or older)
- Give references from former landlords
- 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:

- Complained to the health department, housing code office or the Fair Rent Commission,
- Asked your landlord to fix your apartment, or
- Joined a tenant’s 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 to lock you out even if you owe money.

For more information, see our booklet *Eviction*.

Utilities

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

For more information, read our booklet: *Energy and 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 or older, the landlord cannot charge you more than 1 month's rent for the security deposit.

For more information, read our booklet: *Security Deposits and Rent Increases*.

Lead Poisoning

Lead is very dangerous for young children under 6 and pregnant women and their babies.

Lead can cause serious health problems, such as:

- Mental retardation and learning disabilities,
- Vision, behavior, hearing and growth problems, and even 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 a high lead level, 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 Infoline at 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, color,
- Family, if you have children, 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.