



Tenant Screening: Your Rights

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- ❖ Read this only if you are trying to rent in Washington state.
 - ❖ **COVID-19 Update! Eviction law is changing quickly. There are temporary bans and changes to how courts handle evictions. Things may be different depending on where you live.** Get the latest information and learn about help for evictions in your area at WashingtonLawHelp.org: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): There are only a few reasons your landlord can evict you right now](#)
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Should I read this?

Yes, if you are looking for an apartment, house, or mobile home to rent in Washington state. If you apply to rent a place to live, the landlord may “screen” you. “Screening” means the landlord checks into your background. This helps the landlord decide if they want to rent to you.

What will I learn from reading this?

You will learn:

- What the landlord must tell you about the screening process
- How much the landlord can charge you for screening expenses
- What you can do if you disagree with any of what the landlord learned from

screening you

- What you can do if the landlord does not follow the law

❖ **Stop here** if you have an eviction in your past and want to keep the screening company from using it against you. Get our [How to Stop a Landlord from Denying your Housing Application Because of an Eviction](#) packet.

What is the landlord supposed to do?

A landlord must let you know the following **before** you hand in your application:

- What types of information the landlord will get as part of the screening
- What information from the screening may cause the landlord to reject your application
- If the landlord uses a consumer report:
 - the consumer reporting agency's name and address
 - your right to a free copy of the consumer report if the landlord turns down your application
 - your right to dispute (challenge) the accuracy of information in the report

The landlord must post this information **or** give it to you in writing. Telling you this information verbally is not enough.

Can the landlord charge me to screen me?

Yes, **but**:

- only if the landlord also lets you know the above, in writing, **and**
- only for the actual costs of any screening.

The landlord may not charge you any more than what a local screening service would normally charge. This can include costs for time spent calling your past and present landlords, employers, and banks.

The landlord turned down my tenant application based on something they found in screening me. What can I do?

The landlord must give you a written notice stating their reasons. A sample blank notice below shows what it should look like. It must look “substantially” like our sample form. It must have the same information our sample form would have.

The landlord did not tell me beforehand what information they would use to screen me. But they turned my tenant application down because of the information they got from screening me. What can I do?

You can sue the landlord. The court could award you up to one hundred dollars, plus court costs and attorneys' fees.

Are any other tenant screening protections available to me?

Yes. A landlord cannot deny an applicant or treat a tenant differently because their income comes from sources other than wages from a job. Some examples of these other income sources include Aged, Blind, or Disabled cash assistance (ABD), child support, pension or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). To learn more, read [Tenants: New Legal Protection from Discrimination Based on Source of Income](#).

If you are renting in Seattle, you have still more protections. Seattle landlords:

- **Cannot** give preferential treatment to applicants (favor one over others) based on whom the applicants work for

- **Must** offer a rental agreement to the first qualified applicant who turns in a complete application
- **Cannot** advertise "no criminal record" or deny applicants based on a criminal record
- Between March 3, 2020 and six months after the COVID-19-related civil emergency ends, landlords cannot deny a tenant housing or take adverse action because of a COVID-19-related eviction history.

To learn more, read the City of Seattle's [Renting in Seattle](#).

Get Legal Help

Outside King County, call the CLEAR Hotline at 1-888-201-1014 weekdays between 9:15 am - 12:15 pm.

In King County, call 2-1-1 weekdays between 8:00 am - 6:00 pm. They will refer you to a legal aid provider.

Seniors (age 60 and over) can also call CLEAR*Sr at 1-888-387-7111, statewide.

You can also apply online with CLEAR*Online: nwjustice.org/get-legal-help.

This publication provides general information concerning your rights and responsibilities. It is not intended as a substitute for specific legal advice.

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ADVERSE ACTION NOTICE

Your Name

Your Address

Your City/State/Zip Code

This notice is to inform you that your application has been [landlord must check one]:

_____ Rejected

_____ Approved with conditions:

_____ Residency requires an increased deposit

_____ Residency requires a qualified guarantor

_____ Residency requires last month's rent

_____ Residency requires an increased monthly rent of \$.....

_____ Other:

Adverse action on your application was based on the following [landlord must check all that apply]:

_____ Information contained in a consumer report (The prospective landlord must include the name, address, and phone number of the consumer reporting agency that furnished the consumer report that contributed to the adverse action.)

_____ The consumer credit report did not contain sufficient information

_____ Information received from previous rental history or reference

_____ Information received in a criminal record

_____ Information received in a civil record

_____ Information received from an employment verification

Dated this _____ day of _____, 20 _____

Agent/Owner Signature