

# My landlord illegally ended my tenancy or evicted me

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❖ You can find all the fact sheets we link to here at [WashingtonLawHelp.org](https://www.washingtonlawhelp.org).

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## Should I read this?

Yes, if you rent the place where you live in Washington State and you left the home you rented after your landlord gave you a notice saying you had to leave. In some situations, if you left your home without a court order telling you to move out, you can get damages if your landlord's actions were unlawful (if you were *wrongfully evicted*).

State law says a landlord can be responsible (can be *liable*) for harm they caused you if they told you had to leave or if they lock or force you out illegally. A court could order the landlord to pay you for any losses or expenses caused by the wrongful eviction, or for up to 3 months' rent plus court costs.

## What is a wrongful eviction?

In most cases, landlords must give a "good" reason to end (to *terminate*) a tenancy or evict a tenant. Landlords must give a written notice, on paper. It may be called a "Notice to Terminate Tenancy" or "Notice to Vacate." The notice must list the reason why the landlord wants you to leave.

A **wrongful eviction** can happen when a landlord does not give the notice or does not follow the law after giving the notice. Read [Landlords must give a "good" reason to end certain tenancies](#) to learn more.

## Why is the law important?

The harm from wrongful eviction could be serious. People who are evicted can face homelessness, loss of property, emotional distress, anxiety, and poor health outcomes.

This new law recognizes that people who are wrongfully told to leave their homes have emotional distress, or pain and suffering, and should be compensated when their landlord illegally forces them to move.

## Does the new law cover me?

If you paid rent for a house, apartment, or room, you are probably covered by the [Residential Landlord Tenant Act](#) and can take advantage of this law.

## What will I learn from reading this?

You will learn about some situations the new law counts as wrongful eviction, and the basics about suing your landlord.

## The landlord asked me to move. Was it legal for my landlord to do this?

It depends. Here are some **examples** of situations that are now “wrongful evictions” under the new state law:

- Your landlord gave you a 90-Day Notice to Terminate Tenancy. It said your landlord or someone from your landlord’s family wanted to move into the unit. You moved out because of this notice. But your landlord or their family member never actually moved into the unit and continued to rent it out.
- Your landlord gave you a 90-Day Notice to Terminate Tenancy. It said your landlord wanted to sell the unit. You moved out because of this notice. But your landlord never tried to sell the unit and continued to rent it out.
- Your landlord gave you a 30-Day Notice to Terminate. It said the property was uninhabitable (it was *condemned*). You moved out because of this notice. You found out later that no local agency ever said the place was condemned and was going to fine your landlord if you stayed.
- Your landlord gave you a 120-Day Notice to Terminate. It said your landlord wanted to renovate, remodel, or demolish the rental unit or building. You moved out because of the notice. But your landlord never did what the notice claimed your landlord was going to do with the unit or building.
- Your landlord gave you a 120-Day Notice to Terminate. It said your landlord was going to convert your rental into a condo. But that never happened.

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❖ **There are other ways, not listed here, that your landlord might illegally say you have to move.** Ask a lawyer for advice about your situation.

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Some cases may be harder to prove or win than others. Every case is different. Try to talk to a lawyer about your situation right away. See contact info below.

### **One of the situations listed above as wrongful describes what happened to me. What can I do about it?**

You can take your landlord to court (sue your landlord). A judge who agrees that you lost your home because of the landlord's unlawful action could order the landlord to pay the damages from the emotional distress this caused you, or up to 3 times the monthly rent, plus the costs of filing the case (court costs and any attorney's fees).

### **Where would I sue the landlord?**

It depends on how much you will ask court to order your landlord to pay you. If under \$10,000, you should sue in the Small Claims Court in the county where the eviction happened.

The advantage of using small claims court is that it is informal, cheap to file your case, and neither you or your landlord will have a lawyer. Read [What is Small Claims Court?](#) and [How do I Sue in Small Claims Court?](#) to learn more.

### **Do I need a lawyer?**

It is always a good idea to talk to a lawyer before you file anything with a court. But you do not need a lawyer to file a case or go to a hearing in Small Claims Court. You are also not allowed to have one there.

If you are suing for more than \$10,000, you will need to file a lawsuit in your county's District Court or Superior Court. This is hard but not impossible to do on your own without a lawyer.

### **What if my landlord locked me out without getting a court order first allowing the landlord to evict me?**

Read [My Landlord Locked Me Out: What Can I Do](#) and talk to a lawyer right away.

## Get Legal Help

- **Apply online:** [nwjustice.org/apply-online](https://nwjustice.org/apply-online)
- **Facing Eviction?** Call 1-855-657-8387
- **Facing Foreclosure?** Call 1-800-606-4819
- **Facing a legal issue in King County** (other than Eviction or Foreclosure)? Call 211 (or toll-free 1-877-211-9274) weekdays 8:00 am to 6:00 pm. They will refer you to a legal aid provider.
- **Facing a legal issue outside of King County** (other than Eviction or Foreclosure)? Call the CLEAR Hotline at 1-888-201-1014 weekdays between 9:15 am and 12:15 pm or apply online at [nwjustice.org/apply-online](https://nwjustice.org/apply-online).
- **Seniors (age 60 and over)** with a legal issue outside of King County can also call CLEAR\*Sr at 1-888-387-7111

**Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired callers** can call any of these numbers using the relay service of your choice.

Interpreters provided.

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