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WWW.SOPHIEYANOW.COM

TEXT BY VERMONT TENANTS, CVOEO

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THE VERMONT ARTS COUNCIL
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THE FAIR HOUSING PROJECT OF CVOEO
JEAN MURRAY & VT LEGAL AID
Housing is a basic need, but it's not always easy to find good quality, stable, affordable housing.

Discrimination based on race, gender, religion, etc. is illegal, but it may occur in subtle ways during your housing search.

I don't take Section 8.
I'll have to raise the deposit by $500 because your people cause more damages.

How about this?

$50 extra per kid

I don't think this neighborhood is right for you. Let me show you a unit we have open down the street.

We don't take pets.
FAIR HOUSING

IT IS ILLEGAL TO DISCRIMINATE IN THE RENTAL, SALE OR FINANCING OF HOUSING FOR OR OF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Origin</td>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
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<td>Sex</td>
<td>Receipt of Public Assistance</td>
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<td>Having Kids</td>
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<td>Disability</td>
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(These are protected nationwide)

(These are protected in Vermont)

IF YOU FEEL YOU HAVE BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST, CALL:

VERMONT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
1 (800) 416-2010 OR (802) 828-2480 (VOICE/TTY)

VERMONT LAW HELP
1 (800) 889-2047

VERMONT CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING
(INFORMATION AND ADVOCACY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES)
1 (800) 639-1522 OR (802) 229-0501 (VOICE/TTY)
When a rental is offered, you may want a written lease. In Vermont, a verbal agreement is legally binding, but a written lease can be a helpful record of all the agreements.

A lease will clarify things like how long a rental lasts, when rent is due, who can live in the unit, how much it costs, etc.

It is important that you read and understand your lease before you sign it.

Call VT Tenants if you have questions about specific parts of the lease: (802) 864-0099

Some rights are protected by Vermont law and can’t be given away in a lease:
- The right to safe and decent housing
- Proper notice before your landlord enters your unit, raises rent, or asks you to move out
- The right to contest evictions in court
- Refundable security deposits

But many other things, even if not fair to you, can be legally enforceable once you sign, including:
- The day of the month that rent is due
- Whether or not other people can come live with you
- How much notice you have to give before moving out
After you have added any agreed upon changes to the lease, sign it, and...

**Get a copy and keep it in a safe place!**

Keeping a good written record is a very important way to protect yourself as a renter.

I think this needs some changes.

This will help you begin your “paper trail” -- documentation that can be used to help you in court should any problems arise in your rental.

Your lease might not mention local ordinances, but it is up to you to know what they are.

There is one more thing to remember about your rental agreement...

For example, if your town has “quiet hours,” find out when they begin.
A security deposit is money you pay to your landlord upon move in. That is refundable when you move out. (Get a receipt!)

The deposit is intended to protect a landlord against being stuck with expenses the tenant was supposed to pay. Therefore, a landlord can only keep your deposit (or a portion of it) if:

- you have caused damage beyond normal wear and tear
- you owe rent or have unpaid utilities
- the landlord has expenses for removing property you left in the apartment
- you moved out without proper notice.

To ensure you get your deposit back:

Take pictures of the unit before you move your things in.

Save the pictures!

In Burlington and Barre, your landlord cannot charge more than one month’s rent for a deposit (including anything called “last month’s rent”) and must return your deposit with interest when you move out.
After giving notice, be sure to provide your landlord with a forwarding address so they can send your deposit.

They have 14 days to either return your full deposit or return a list of things they are deducting from the deposit, along with the remaining amount owed.

After the 14 day period, your landlord must return the entire deposit to you.

If a court finds your landlord intentionally failed to return the deposit, your landlord may owe you double the amount of the original deposit.

Clean your apartment before you move out, and remove all of your belongings & trash. Then, take pictures!

Pay the claimant $1600!

See, that window was broken when I moved in.

I'm moving to White River Junction!

It's been 15 days and I haven't received it.

The law requires you to reimburse me in full.
Your landlord is required to give you 48 hours’ notice to enter your apartment, unless there is a serious emergency, or you have invited them in.

Even with notice, your landlord can only enter without your invitation:

- To do an inspection
- To conduct necessary or agreed upon repairs, improvements, or services
- To show the apartment to prospective tenants, buyers, or workers

They can only enter between the hours of 9am and 9pm.

Tenants cannot unreasonably withhold consent for their landlords to enter.

Sorry I’m early!

I’m here like we scheduled!
Rent

You are entitled to 60 days' notice before getting a rent increase (90 in Burlington).

I'm raising the rent in two weeks.

I'm also protected by our lease. That also requires more notice.

Then I need to stop covering heat. That also requires more notice.

Rent Increases

Always pay your rent in checks, or get a written receipt every time you pay in cash.

You are entitled to 60 days' notice before getting a rent increase (90 in Burlington).

You are required to give me more notice than that.

Your landlord cannot raise your rent during the term of the lease, unless the lease allows for that.

Reducing services (like no longer including heat, garbage, plowing, etc.) counts as a rent increase.

This helps create a record of your timely rent payments.

Rent Increases

I'm raising the rent in two weeks.

You're required to give me more notice than that.

I'm also protected by our lease.
HABITABILITY

All renters have the right to safe & decent housing. That right is something you cannot sign away in a lease.

Some examples include:

- Running, drinkable water, hot water, flushing toilets, sinks, showers or bathtubs, and sewage disposal.
- Safe structures, with doors and windows that close, roofs that don’t leak, etc.
- Heating systems that can heat to at least 65°F (18°C) during cold months.
- A house that is safe from the hazards of lead poisoning, which is particularly dangerous to young kids’ developing brains. Kids might ingest toxic dust from chipping paint.

Fire safety: bedroom windows that you can escape from, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.
Your landlord is responsible for ensuring that your dwelling is safe to live in.

Houses built before 1978 probably were painted with lead paint.

Landlords in buildings built before then are required to do basic maintenance every year to ensure that paint is not chipping or peeling.

It is your responsibility to take good care of the unit and tell your landlord as soon as you notice a repair is needed.

This is important for your safety, and also for getting your deposit back when you move out.

If you cause damage, your landlord can charge you for repairs, but the landlord is still responsible for making them.
Repairs

If your landlord won’t make a repair, put the request in writing. This creates a written record that you told your landlord about the repair, and helps you use the legal remedies available to you.

Keep a copy.

If it’s a serious health or safety violation, call your local town health officer. They will come do an inspection, and can issue a notice to your landlord to fix the problem.

I think my heat is broken and my landlord won’t come!

Call VT Tenants if you need help figuring out who your town health officer is.

Get a copy of the inspector’s report. You are legally entitled to one, and it is important for your records.

It’s good you called.

I’ll contact your landlord.

The law protects you if your landlord tries to evict you, raise your rent, or harass you in some way for calling the inspector.
If your landlord does not make a major repair in a reasonable amount of time, you may have the right to...

Break your lease and move out

Sue your landlord for damages

Fix the issue yourself & deduct the cost of the repair from your rent

...or withhold rent until it is fixed.

Each of these remedies is only available in certain circumstances, so call Vermont Tenants before you try any of them!

VT Tenants
802-864-0099 or 1-800-287-7971
VTtenants.org
MOVING OUT

You should usually get 14-120 days' notice in writing when the landlord wants you to move out.

Depending on the reason, where you live, and how long you’ve lived in the apartment, call us for help figuring out what it is in your case.

If you choose to move out early, you can be forced to pay rent on the unit until the lease is up, the notice period is over or the apartment is filled.

When moving out, it is important to remove all your belongings & trash, and leave the apartment clean, in order to have your deposit returned.

You need to pay the full two month's rent.

You must give notice before you move out: at least one full rental period (2 in Burlington), unless your lease lists a different notice period.

I want to move in a month.

Take pictures of the unit after you move so that you have a record of the condition you left it in!

Don't forget to leave a forwarding address so your landlord can mail you your deposit!
**EVICTIONS**

A written notice ending your tenancy is the first legally required step in the eviction process.

If you believe you are being asked to move for an illegal reason such as discrimination, retaliation for asking for repairs, or if you have not been given legal notice, you may choose to fight the request to move out.

But the apartment is still unsafe.

In this case, your landlord must take you to court in a formal eviction proceeding.

Evictions are a very specific court process, and ultimately a judge makes the final decision.

It is illegal for a landlord to try to evict you by turning off your utilities, changing the locks, tossing out your stuff, or otherwise blocking your use of the unit.

Evictions can be expensive, and any kind of bad reference from a landlord can make finding a rental difficult in the future. Make sure you have a strong case before going to court.

Call a lawyer if you ever get an eviction notice! Legal Aid's hotline number is 1-800-889-2047.

Hey! Jiggle Jiggle

I need to move my mom in.

She'll manage.

Hey! Oh boy.

But the apartment is still unsafe.
RESOURCES

RENTER HOTLINES:

VT TENANTS
(802) 864-0099 OR TOLL-FREE 1-800-287-7971
VTTENANTS.ORG

VERMONT LAW HELP
1-800-889-2047
VTLAWHELP.ORG

FAIR HOUSING COMPLAINT LINE:

VERMONT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
1-800-416-2010 OR (802) 828-2480 (VOICE/TTY)
HRC.VERMONT.GOV/HOW-TO-FILE

FAIR HOUSING GROUP TRAINING:

CVOEO FAIR HOUSING PROJECT
802-864-3334 EXT. 106
CVOEO.ORG/FHP

FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES:

VERMONT CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING
1-800-639-1522
(802) 229-0501 (VOICE/TTY)

RELATED LAWS AND CODE:

VERMONT STATE STATUTES: TITLE 9: COMMERCE AND TRADE
CHAPTER 137: RESIDENTIAL RENTAL AGREEMENTS
LEGISLATURE.VERMONT.GOV/STATUTES/CHAPTER/09/137

VERMONT RENTAL HOUSING HEALTH CODE
WWW.HEALTHVERMONT.GOV/REGS/RENTAL_HOUSING_CODE.PDF

FIRE AND BUILDING SAFETY CODE
FIRESAFETY.VERMONT.GOV