SOUTH CAROLINA LEGAL SERVICES

10 Things to Know Before You Rent
MANY HOUSING LEGAL PROBLEMS CAN BE PREVENTED

Understanding a bit about:

- Housing law
- Responsibilities of tenants and landlords
- How leases work
- Financial issues and practicalities
1. A BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP

Your landlord is not your friend!

- Check into your potential landlord’s reputation before you sign a lease.
- Get everything in writing
- Keep copies of all documentation and correspondence between the landlord and you.
2. READ AND UNDERSTAND YOUR LEASE

- A lease is an enforceable contract between you and the landlord

- A good lease protects you as much as them

- All agreements between the landlord and you should be in the lease before you sign it.

- Be sure you completely understand and agree to all of the provisions in the lease. Never let anyone pressure you into signing
3. KEY LEASE TERMS TO UNDERSTAND (AND NEGOTIATE)

- “Term” of the lease - how long it lasts
- What happens at the end of the lease term
- What is the security deposit?
- What happens if someone else lives in the home; subletters, etc.
3. KEY LEASE TERMS TO UNDERSTAND (AND NEGOTIATE)

- What happens if *you* break the lease?
- Housing conditions: Property damage vs normal wear and tear?
- Landlord’s right of entry
- Other issues like pets, parking, noise, rights to use common areas, responsibility for common spaces (i.e. mowing)
3. KEY LEASE TERMS TO UNDERSTAND (AND NEGOTIATE)

- Is negotiation, mediation or arbitration required?
- What happens if the unit is sold
- What the lease say about attorneys’ fees.
4. SAFETY: A COLLABORATION BETWEEN LANDLORD AND TENANT

- **LANDLORDS:**
  Needs to provide a safe and “habitable” home, including basic appliances, water, security, a working roof, heat, etc.

- **TENANTS:**
  Need to keep themselves safe in the home: know where smoke alarms and fire extinguishers are and notify the landlord of any unsafe conditions.
5. LOCATION AND COSTS

- Location matters: Visit potential neighborhoods a few times, at different times of the day, before deciding on whether to rent.

- Go shopping: Remember to factor household costs into your budget; don’t forget the security deposit, last month’s rent, and background check fees.

- Roommate caution: Remember that when you sign a lease together, you could be responsible for the whole bill if roommates do not pay their share.
6. GET RENTERS’ INSURANCE — IT’S CHEAP AND NECESSARY

Costing as little as $12 a month

Renters’ insurance could save you,

- if your belongings are stolen
- destroyed in a fire
- as well as theft from other places, such as the trunk of your car.
Remember, while paying rent, the apartment is your private home first and the landlord’s property second.

You have the right:

- To complain without being retaliated against - but put everything in writing!
- To not to be discriminated against (race, color, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, or family composition)
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