



Fair Tenant Screening

Eliminating Costly and Unfair Barriers to Housing



Prime Sponsors

Senators Kohl-Welles and Frockt will each introduce complementary Tenant Screening Bills in 2012.

Advocacy Partners

- Children's Home Society of Washington
- Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness
- Tenants Union of Washington State
- Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Protecting Domestic Violence Survivors

"DV advocates feel compelled to warn victims that if they file a protection order or take similar court action to protect themselves, that it can harm their ability to get housing in the future." - Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Helping families reunify

Some families do the hard work of recovery and stabilization, so that they can reunify their families by bringing their children home and out of the child welfare system. But the high and repeated costs of tenant screening reports creates one last and sometimes insurmountable barrier. Low-income families can't afford to pay for reports over and over in their search for a safe home.

Ensuring high reporting standards

Enacting Fair Tenant Screening standards will not impede on a landlord's ability to access a high quality report. A portable report must be comprehensive. If a landlord has a relationship with a company they trust, they can always purchase another report from that company as well. They just can't charge the tenant for the cost of it.

Enacting Fair Tenant Screening standards will ensure that one of Washington's fastest growing data-mining industries will produce reports that are fair and accurate.

Together, these bills will address the repeated cost of tenant screening reports, and the inaccurate and misleading information that is sometimes contained in those reports, while still allowing landlords to access the information they need to make a sound rental decision.

Portability

Tenants pay over and over again for tenant screening reports which contain largely the same information. Tenants pay between \$35 and \$50 with each application for housing. But allowing a tenant to offer a portable report, through a secure internet site, will allow tenants to pay for just one comprehensive and high quality report. If the landlord doesn't like that report, they can simply purchase their own.

Accuracy

Tenant Screening Companies always report whether a tenant was named in an eviction case, but rarely — if ever — report the outcome or the circumstances of the case. Residential landlords usually refuse to rent to any tenant who has been named in an eviction lawsuit. Because of this practice, tenants are strongly deterred from defending themselves in court — even when they have a strong defense.

The Experiences of Washington's Tenants

- A tenant with a disability asserts the right to a reasonable accommodation that is needed to meet the lease terms, but is nonetheless sued for eviction.
- A domestic violence survivor breaks a lease in accordance with the law to flee an abuser, but is still sued in eviction court for not fulfilling the terms of the lease.
- A tenant is sued for eviction, but wins in court on the merits of the case. She is denied housing five years later because of the eviction record.
- A tenant asserts the right to "repair and deduct" to fix a serious problem that the landlord has failed to address. The tenant is sued in eviction court for the rent, wins, but is denied housing later because of the record.

Foreclosure Impacts

Many tenants in Washington were caught up in a landlord's foreclosure and evicted by next owner. It is estimated that many thousands of tenants across the state have an unfair eviction on their record that was the result result of their landlord's foreclosure.