

Make Tenant Screening Report Costs Fair & Affordable for All Renters

Pass the Fair Tenant Screening Act

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The lack of a portable tenant screening report standard is a real obstacle to a home.

Thomas's Story



"I was living in a homeless shelter in Tacoma and was trying to find a rental apartment. I

had budgeted enough money for the average studio apartment in Tacoma, including first and last rent, a deposit, and at least three tenant screening reports, at roughly \$35 each. **My transition from shelter to home took three more months than I expected.**

I had to keep paying for repeat tenant screening reports that various landlords requested during my search. **After I ran out of money paying for the reports, I had to stop my search until the next paycheck.** If I could've purchased just one standard report that all landlords had to accept, then I could have applied to more places and moved into my new apartment much sooner.

And had I been able to leave the shelter sooner, I could've saved the City of Tacoma money and opened up space for someone whose situation was worse than mine."

A portable report will be easier and more efficient for landlords too.

Tim Seth, President of the Washington Landlord Association
"The majority of Washington landlords do not operate out of sophisticated management offices, or other large-scale operations. As such, many landlords would find the consequence of [the Fair Tenant Screening Act] more timely in the pick-and-shovel business of selecting tenants (by not always having to take the additional time to wait for the filling out of new applications, then to submit & wait more for a completely new screen)."

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Portable tenant screening reports just make sense.

If you've ever repeatedly paid for the same costly tenant screening report in the search for a home, then you'll understand the need for this legislation. The average renter will have to pay for three or more tenant screening reports when they are trying to find a new home.

Seattle-based organization Solid Ground surveyed tenants who used their programs. **They found these tenants spent on average \$166 for repeat screening reports during a single housing search.** These screening fees can become a significant moving cost, especially for families on limited incomes, already burdened with a deposit and first month's rent. And for what? One tenant screening report has virtually the same information as the other reports. **Wouldn't it be more efficient and practical to buy just one online report and provide the log-in information to all the landlords requesting this data?** This legislation aims to do just that.

How might a portable tenant screening report work?

1. A renter buys a standard online tenant screening report that meets the legal definition of a current and comprehensive report.
2. When this renter provides access to this secure, online report to landlords, they should not be able to charge this prospective tenant for another report.
3. Landlords will still be free to use their own tenant screening company, but they won't be able to charge the tenant for this cost.

Tenants and landlords benefit.

This legislation will be beneficial to all renters and property owners in Washington. The current state of tenant screening reports is particularly harmful to low-income renters who are already cost-burdened with security deposits and first and last month's rent. And more landlords will be provided with a comprehensive screening report, giving them the information they need to make a solid rental decision.

What is in a comprehensive report?

A comprehensive report should be current, meaning that it has been created within the last 30 days, and it should include the same information that standard comprehensive reports on the market currently contain.

Advocates will work with stakeholders, including landlords, to define a current and comprehensive report. One possibility is that landlords could access these reports through a secure online portal using a tenant screening company-generated password. These reports would only be valid for one month after purchase.

Why the rental housing lobby hates this legislation.

The Rental Housing Association of Washington is the state's largest and most powerful lobbying group for landlords. They are also a "full service tenant screening and credit reporting company," which is a source of revenue. RHA receives much more money when a tenant searching for a home has to pay multiple times for the same report, rather than only paying once. RHA might claim they are lobbying to protect information contained on screening reports. But really, it's about their bottom line.

What is the legislative ask?

Pass the Fair Tenant Screening Act to make the tenant screening process more affordable and fair for both tenants and landlords.