

## **Information about Rental Laws in Maine *and what to do if you have problems***

Here are some things that you should do **before you move into an apartment:**

- Read the lease carefully. Ask questions if you don't understand.
- Find out who will pay for heat, hot water, electricity, parking, snow removal and trash removal.
- Try the oven and other appliances. Make sure they work. See if the windows open and the doors lock.
- Make a list and take photos of any problems in the apartment, such as broken windows. Ask the landlord to sign the list. That shows that he knows about the problems. He should pay to fix them.
- Find out how to control the heat.
- If you are paying for any utilities, find out how much they cost last year. The utility company must give you that information.
- Ask if the landlord had the building checked for bed bugs and, if so, when.
- Talk to someone who lives in the apartment. Find out whether the neighborhood is safe.
- Get contact information for the landlord.
- Landlords may not discriminate against you because of your race, sex, religion or national origin. Landlords also can't discriminate against you because you get welfare or because you are a single parent, pregnant or have children. A landlord cannot refuse to rent to you, charge you extra, or evict you for any of these reasons.

Here are some other things you should know about renting an apartment:

- If you don't have a Social Security number, landlords can refuse to rent to you. They use the number to check your credit.
- The landlord must provide working smoke alarms in every bedroom and carbon monoxide alarms on every floor.
- There must be two ways to escape from every room in the case of a fire. The main way could be a door or staircase. The second way could be a large window or balcony.
- If you share rent, the landlord can charge you for all of the rent if your roommates don't pay their share.

- Whenever you have a problem, tell the landlord in writing and keep a copy. Don't call, write. Writing is proof that you took action. If your apartment has a safety problem, say that in your letter.
- Your landlord must get an order from court before he or she can evict you. That takes at least a month.
- Tenants at will must also provide landlords with at least 30 days written notice if the tenant chooses to move. A landlord and tenant may agree, in writing, upon a shorter notice period. In the City of Portland, landlords are required to give tenants a 75-day written notice of any rent increase. [Rental Housing Rights Document - City of Portland]
- The landlord is required to return your security deposit or provide a written statement of the reasons for keeping the deposit. If you are a tenant at will, this must be done within 21 days after you have turned the apartment over to the landlord. If you have a written lease, the landlord must return your deposit within the time stated in your lease; but in no event, can this period exceed 30 days. Remember, a landlord may keep all or part of your security deposit for non-payment of rent or utility charges or the cost of disposing of unclaimed property. [Maine Consumer Law Guide 14-3C]

Landlords must provide apartments that are safe and fit to live in. For example, the water must be drinkable and the heating system must work so that you can heat the apartment to about 68 degrees in the winter.

If your apartment has a safety problem, write to the landlord and ask him or her to fix it. Keep a copy of the letter. If the problem isn't resolved, contact the city's health officer or building code enforcement officer. If you live in Portland, call the city's permitting and inspections office at 874-8703. They will arrange for an inspection.

You can find more information about Maine rental laws at the Pine Tree Legal Assistance website: <http://www.ptla.org/rights-tenants-maine> It has copies of letters that you can write to your landlord to solve problems such as getting your security deposit back.

Pine Tree Legal Assistance provides free legal help with rental problems to people with low incomes who are U.S. citizens or have a green card. They also provide some assistance to asylum seekers. Their Portland office is at 88 Federal Street.

They are open for walk-ins (people without appointments) on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. They have interpreters. You may call (774-8211) on Mondays from 12 to 3 p.m. or Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.