

# Before you Rent

## 1. Read the lease carefully *before* signing

- ◊ Ask about anything you do not understand
- ◊ Look for hidden charges or penalties
- ◊ If you sign the lease, you may be stuck paying those charges
- ◊ Make sure you understand, and it is clearly stated in your lease, what is a *deposit* and what is a *fee*. A deposit may be refunded when you move out, a fee is non-refundable.

## 2. If something is important to you, get it in *writing*

- ◊ Do not count on a verbal promise

## 3. Find out who pays for hot water, heat, electricity, parking, snow removal and trash disposal

## 4. Find the utility controls and ask questions such as:

- ◊ Where is the thermostat? Who controls it?
- ◊ Where is the electrical box?
- ◊ Where is the hot water heater? Can I change the temperature on the hot water heater?

## 5. Check out the building, the landlord and the neighborhood

- ◊ Try to talk to a current tenant about what the building and the landlord are like
- ◊ Check for off-street parking, public transportation, and stores
- ◊ Try to check out the neighborhood at night

## 6. Be *very* careful about putting money down to “hold the apartment”

- ◊ If you decide not to rent it, the landlord may not return your “holding” money

## 7. Consider buying tenant’s/renter’s insurance

- ◊ Your landlord’s insurance does not protect you from damage or loss of furniture or other property in most situations

## 8. Get something to keep all your rental records in

- ◊ For example: a binder, large envelope or a file folder

This information is provided as a courtesy by the Legal Action Center. All law cited is up-to-date as of June, 2012.

If you need legal advice and would like to speak with an attorney, please contact us at  
206-324-6890

100 23rd Avenue South  
Seattle, Washington 98144-2302

Other resources include:

Housing Justice Project  
206-267-7090

CLEAR  
206-461-3200