

FAQ – Philadelphia Fair Housing Commission

Q. What Does the Philadelphia Fair Housing Commission Do?

A. We enforce the Philadelphia Fair Housing Ordinance that addresses certain unfair rental practices. We provide guidance to Tenants and Landlords on their responsibilities as they relate to this Ordinance and hold hearings that result in the issuing of an Order. Only tenants may initiate complaints here. (We do not find housing for persons looking to buy or rent).

Q. What Kind of Complaints Does the Fair Housing Commission Handle?

A. *Unfair Evictions
*Unfair Rent Increases
*Changes in Terms/Conditions of the Lease
*Cutting Off of Heat, Water, Electricity, Gas.
- Retaliation

*(Must also have Licenses & Inspection Violations or Lead Paint)

Q. Do I Have To Be A Philadelphia Resident?

A. Yes! --In order to file with the Philadelphia Fair Housing Commission.

Q. Do Your Services Cover Section 8 or Public Housing Authority Housing?

A. Section 8-Yes! Public Housing Authority--No!

Q. Do I Have to be Living in The Residence While I File a Fair Housing Complaint?

A. Yes, in most cases, you have to be living in the property at the time you file and at the time of your hearing.

Q. Can I File If I Don't Have A Copy of the Lease?

A. Yes, a Verbal Lease is accepted. Any monetary transactions between the Tenant and Landlord in payment for shelter establishes a Verbal Lease.

Q. Does My Rent Have To Be Current? Do I Need Receipts?

A. Yes, your rent has to be current and you must have receipts for the past three (3) months or an escrow account. Provide receipts in the form of money orders, cancelled checks or any type of written format. It is not recommended that you pay rent in cash.

Q. What Do I Do If the Landlord Changes My Lock?

A. If you are locked out of your apartment or home, call 911 immediately. Ask for a Police Department Supervisor. When the police arrive, present proof that you live there - Copy of your lease, rent receipts, bills, driver's license, etc.

--The police should contact your landlord and ask him to produce an "Alias Writ of Possession" that was executed by the Sheriff's Office or Landlord-Tenant Officer;

--If the Landlord cannot produce this "Writ of Possession", the Police should inform the Tenant to re-enter the home and ask the Landlord to let the Tenant back onto the property. The Police should arrest the Landlord for violating the anti-lock ordinance if he or she refuses to let the Tenant into the property. If the police cannot find the Landlord, the Tenant can get a Locksmith to change the locks. The Tenant should get a receipt and deduct the expenses from their rent. If you have followed all of these steps and cannot get back into your property, call Community Legal Services at 215-981-3700. Also, if you believe there are serious repair problems in the property, consider filing a Fair Housing Complaint.

Q. What do I do if the Landlord takes me to court?

A. Follow the orders issued by the court. You cannot file with us if you already have a court date. If you have already filed a FH complaint with us and then receive a notice from Landlord/Tenant Court, call us immediately and fax a copy of the L/T Notice to us so that we can postpone the eviction.

Q. What should I do if the Landlord doesn't provide heat?

A. First call the Heat Crisis Hotline at 215-686-2590.

If the utility itself has been shut off either by the landlord's direct action or because the landlord did not pay the bill, for which the landlord is responsible per the lease, this is considered an illegal lockout and it is an eviction for Fair Housing purposes. Now FH staff must look for other Housing Code (L&I) violations in order to consider taking the complaint. The shut off cannot count as both an eviction and an L&I violation.

If the utility is on, but there is a problem with the heater (it malfunctions and works sporadically, it is completely broken or the landlord turns it on and off at will), this is considered a Housing Code (L&I) violation. Now Fair Housing staff must look for a threat of eviction, a rent increase, another change in the lease or retaliation in order to consider taking the complaint.

Q. Is There A Cost For These Services?

A. No, services are performed free of charge.

Q. If I Think I Am Eligible to File A Complaint, Whom Do I Call?

A. The Philadelphia Fair Housing Commission at 215-686-3237 or 215-686-4670.

Q. What Must I Bring With Me?

A. Copy of your Lease.
Rent Receipts for the Last 3 months.
Escrow Account
Licenses & Inspection 6-digit Service File Number (call 215-686-2463)

"Having Landlord/Tenant Problems? - Call Us and Help Us Help You!"