

Parent Advocacy Tips

1. Document problems or concerns

- a. Get copies of important documents related to your problem and keep them together in a file
- b. Get promises or refusals to do things in writing
- c. Use a notebook and calendar to write down concerns or problems
- d. Take good notes about conversations you have
- e. Take pictures if possible

2. Read everything

- a. Even if people are rushing you, read the whole document before you sign anything

3. When in doubt, ask

- a. Ask people to write a summary for you in regular language
- b. Ask to take a document home and have someone you trust help you understand
- c. Ask people to repeat what they said using different words

4. Don't sign something if you don't agree with it or don't understand it

- a. You may lose important rights if you sign something

5. Plan ahead for meetings

- a. Make a list of what you want to talk about and things you need to bring
- b. Practice what you want to say and how to say it with a friend
- c. Put everything you need in a folder or bag the night before

6. Practice good communication skills

- a. In email: make it short, put your point at the top, and stick to the facts
- b. On the phone: say your name, why you called, and ask if they are the right person to talk to
- c. In texts: introduce yourself and don't talk about difficult issues

7. Stay calm

- a. Listen carefully to understand what people think
- b. Focus on the facts, not on opinions or people
- c. Remember to use good body language

8. Go up the chain of command

- a. Everyone has a supervisor!

Requesting Housing Repairs

The DC Housing Code

DC has a housing code that sets health and safety standards for rental units. Landlords must make repairs so their rental units meet those standards. Repairs must be done properly and using material of a suitable quality.

You can learn more about the D.C. Housing Code at dcra.dc.gov/service/dc-housing-code-standards and dcregs.dc.gov/Gateway/TitleHome.aspx?TitleNumber=14.

How should I make requests?

You should make requests in writing. Even if your landlord wants you to call a maintenance line, you should also make the request in writing. You can send a letter to the address where you mail your rent check if you do not know where else to bring it. Keep a copy of any requests you send.

What information should I keep in my files?

It is important to keep a record in case the landlord does not make repairs, or makes repairs improperly.

- Use a calendar to keep track of: when you have housing problems, what the problems are like, who you contacted for help, what repairs you asked for, and when repairs were made.
- Take photos or videos of problems. If possible, include a slip of paper with the date in the photo.
- Keep copies of inspection reports (more information below) or court documents in a binder or folder.

Where can I get a housing inspection?

The Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs is responsible for inspecting rental units for housing code violations. To ask for an inspection, you can call (202) 442-9557. Before you call, write a list of problems you want to let their office know about. When the inspector comes in about one to two weeks, share the list with the inspector as well. You can call this same number for the results of the inspection.

If you have an urgent or dangerous housing problem (sewage flooding, broken heat, or another emergency), you can get an inspection on the same day. You can call (202) 442-9557, or, if it is after 4:30 p.m., you can call 311 and say that you need an emergency housing inspection.

Should I stop paying rent if my landlord won't make repairs?

If you are thinking about withholding (not paying) your rent, we suggest that you talk to a lawyer first to learn more about the risks involved. Some renters decide to withhold rent because of problems in their unit; however, not paying rent can lead to a landlord filing an eviction proceeding against the renter.

What should I do if the landlord does not make repairs, makes sloppy repairs, or does not finish the repairs?

- **You can request a housing inspection** (information above).
- **You can get information about your rights** from the Landlord-Tenant Resource Center in Room 115 of Court Building B, 510 4th St. NW, Room 115, between 9:15 a.m. and noon, Monday through Friday.
- **You can file a complaint** at the DC Superior Court Civil Clerk's Office, 500 Indiana Avenue NW, Room 5000. The Clerk's Office can answer basic questions about how to fill out forms.
- **You can look for legal help** by visiting lawhelp.org/dc/issues/housing or by calling Children's Law Center at (202) 467-4900 ext. 3.

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No Heat? Get Help!

What does D.C. law say about heat in my apartment?

- **Generally, from October 1 to May 1, landlords must make sure that rental units can stay heated at 68 degrees.** For more information, see 12 DCMR § PM-602G.

What can I do if my heat stops working and my landlord won't fix it?

- **Tell your landlord about the problem in writing and keep a copy for yourself.** Sending an email or a text message is okay.
- **Ask the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) for an emergency housing inspection by calling (202) 442-9557, or, if it is after 4:30 p.m., by calling 311.** DCRA is responsible for inspecting rental units for housing code violations.
- **File a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) at the DC Superior Court Civil Clerk's Office, 500 Indiana Ave NW, Room 5000.** You do not have to have an attorney to file a TRO. The Clerk's Office can answer basic questions about how to fill out forms and give you an instruction sheet on how to serve the Complaint and Summons.
- **Get information about your rights from the Landlord-Tenant Resource Center.** Their office is in Room 115 of Court Building B, 510 4th St. NW, and is open from 9:15 a.m. to noon, Monday through Friday. People who arrive early have a better chance of being seen.

What if I don't have heat because I'm behind on my bills?

- **Call the Public Service Commission's Office of Consumer Services at (202) 626-5120.** They may be able to help you restore your service.
- **Call the D.C. services hotline at 311 and ask about the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).**
- **If it is between January 1 and May 31, contact Salvation Army about the Washington Area Fuel Fund by calling (202) 678-9771 (Southeast office) or (202) 332-5000 (Northwest office).**

Stay Warm and Safe



- **Never use a gas stove, kerosene heater, generator, or grill for heating indoors.** Burning fuel indoors can cause carbon monoxide to build up. Carbon monoxide is a toxic gas that can cause death. Signs of poisoning include headaches, dizziness, weakness, nausea, chest pain, and confusion. If you see signs of carbon monoxide poisoning, call 911 and find fresh air.
- **Call the Shelter Hotline at 1 (800) 535-7252 to find a warming center or shelter.** When the temperature falls below 32 degrees between November 1 and March 31, D.C.'s recreation centers open as warming centers during the day and some nights. Severe weather shelters have beds available from 7 pm to 7 am. If you can't get into a shelter or the shelter conditions are bad, you can call Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless at (202) 678-9771 for help.
- **Keep pets warm, too.** Emergency shelters may be available to care for a pet during very cold days. Call D.C.'s Animal Services Program at (202) 535-2323 for information. If you see a pet out in the cold, call the Washington Humane Society at (202) 723-5730.

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D.C. LAW REQUIRES LANDLORDS TO ELIMINATE MOLD USING STANDARDS SET BY D.C. DEPT. OF THE ENVIRONMENT

A landlord's obligations under D.C. law:

If a landlord receives written notice from a tenant about indoor mold in the tenant's apartment or a common area, the landlord must:

- Inspect the mold within 7 days.
- Eliminate any mold that is found during the inspection within 30 days of the inspection.

A landlord must use a professional to eliminate large mold problems:

- If a moldy area in an apartment or common area is *ten square feet* or more, the landlord must use a qualified indoor mold assessment professional to assess the mold problem, and a separate qualified indoor mold remediation professional to eliminate the mold.
 - “*Ten square feet*” of mold means spots or signs of mold growth that are close to each other (likely caused by the same moisture problem) that add up to an area that is ten square feet or more. For example, there is “ten square feet” of mold if the area affected by the mold covers an area that is 5 ft. high and 2 ft. wide.
 - The mold professional must follow standards established by the D.C. Department of the Environment and must eliminate the mold in a way that protects the health of the tenant.
- If the area affected by the mold is less than ten square feet, the landlord may fix the mold problem without using a qualified mold professional. But the landlord still should:

- Consult a qualified mold professional before doing the work.
- Do the work in a way that protects the health of the tenant.
- Follow guidelines for eliminating mold established by the D.C. Department of the Environment.

Key things to remember:

- The landlord should not just paint over the mold. This will not fix the problem.
- The landlord should fix any moisture or ventilation problems that caused the mold problem. This will help make sure the mold does not come back.
- The landlord must tell potential tenants if there was mold in an apartment during the previous 3 years unless the mold was eliminated by a qualified mold professional.
- The landlord may be required to pay damages if the tenant proves in court that the landlord acted in bad faith and failed to eliminate a significant mold problem within 60 days of receiving a written professional mold report.