

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS* FOR BTV RENTERS

RENTAL AGREEMENTS

- Leases can be written or verbal
 - oral agreements are hard to hold up in court, so get everything in writing including casual communications (texts instead of calls) and follow up all verbal conversations with an email
- You cannot sign your rights away in a lease
 - Landlords may put illegal clauses in the lease, but these are not enforceable in court - For example, late fees charged as penalties are prohibited!

LIVING CONDITIONS

- All units must be habitable, meaning:
 - heat, electricity, and running water
 - fire extinguishers and fire escapes
 - working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors
 - weathertight
 - no mold or pests
- Shutting off utilities for no reason is not allowed
 - you should receive advance notice if utilities are turned off for repair.

RENT INCREASES

- Must be announced in writing at least 90 days in advance. Reducing services counts as a rent increase.

RETALIATION

- Landlords cannot raise the rent, remove access to some part of the property, or terminate your tenancy in response to:
 - health, safety, or legal complaints to or about them
 - speaking to a government body like code enforcement or city council
 - forming a tenant association with your neighbors
- Evictions filed 90 days after these events are assumed to be retaliatory, even if they give another reason, and may be illegal

SECURITY DEPOSITS

- A landlord can keep your security deposit to cover:
 - unpaid rent or utility fees
 - property damage beyond normal wear & tear
 - expenses required to remove your stuff
- After you move out, the landlord must do the following within 14 days or they forfeit your deposit:
 - provide you with a written invoice that shows what they are taking from your deposit and why
 - inform you of your right to request a hearing at the **Burlington Housing Board of Review 802-865-7122**
 - return whatever they owe you
- Landlords who withhold deposits illegally may owe you double the amount of the original deposit!

RENTAL APPLICATIONS

- Landlords can ask whatever they want on a rental application, but they
 - can't use that information to discriminate against a protected class.
 - can discriminate based on low income, bad credit, and rental history
- Landlords cannot charge a rental application fee or more than one month's rent for a security deposit

WHAT IF I NEED REPAIRS

- Major code violations like a lack of heat in the winter, leaking sewer pipe, hazardous electrical wiring, and mold:
 - send a certified letter to your landlord demanding immediate repairs and call **Burlington Code Enforcement 802-863-0442**
- Minor code violations like broken appliances, dripping faucets, and trash not picked up:
 - send a certified letter to your landlord requesting repair.
 - if they don't respond in 30 days, fix the issue yourself & deduct the cost of the repair from your rent

PRIVACY

- Landlords are required to give you 48 hours notice before entering your apartment (unless there's a serious emergency, like a fire or major leak)
- They can only enter between 9am to 9pm for inspection, repairs or services, and to show the unit to prospective tenants.

FOR CAUSE EVICTIONS

- A notice to vacate is not the same thing as a formal eviction, but it can turn into one in court. Landlords cannot force you out, turn off the utilities, or change the locks before then.
- You have the right to contest an eviction in court. Call **Legal Aid 802-863-5620**

NO CAUSE EVICTIONS

- For a written lease:
 - minimum 30 days written notice
- For month to month tenants:
 - Minimum 90 day written notice OR 120 day if you've lived there for more than 2 years.
- Minimum 30 day written notice if your building is sold to new owners.

Landlord harassing you? Refusing repairs?

Raising rents? Contact us!

BURLINGTON TENANTS UNITED



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🌐 burlingtontenantsunited.org

📷 [burlingtontenantsunited](https://www.instagram.com/burlingtontenantsunited)

* AND WHAT TO DO WHEN THATS NOT ENOUGH

FORMING A TENANT ASSOCIATION

A tenant association is a group of tenants paying rent to the same landlord who join forces to advocate for their shared interests. They operate a little bit like a worker's union by providing a counterbalance to the power of capital through collective action. Forming a tenant association gives you and your neighbors the capacity to prioritize your needs and enact long-term solutions.

MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS

- Say hi whenever you see them, offer to help with small tasks, eventually working up to longer conversations.
- Once you're comfortable, ask for contact information and invite them to join a neighborhood group chat.
- Host casual get togethers-- beers on the stoop, group gardening mornings, potluck dinners, yard sales, etc.
- Be upfront with your concerns and ideas.
- Identify who agrees on common issues and the need to collectively organize a response. Invite them to canvass with you.
- Keep track of names, unit #s, and what you talk about with each person. What are their lives like? What are their concerns? What do they want to help out with and what are their hesitations or barriers?

HOST A GATHERING

- Open with introductions and an ice breaker-- how long have you lived here? What do you like or dislike about it?
- Talk about your shared concerns-- do you have mold or pests in the building? Rent going up? Ask someone to take notes.
- Brainstorm what you could accomplish together and why forming a tenant association is important.
- Before ending the meeting, set the date and time for the next one. Set an agenda together!

OUTLINE GOALS & ROLES

- Based off your last meeting, create a mission statement and a list of shared goals.
- Discuss a decision-making structure and group agreements.
- Map out skills & tools your neighbors can share with each other, like childcare and minor repairs.
- Make a list of roles you might need filled: note taking, communication, point person for translations or childcare. Only list roles people are willing and able to take on right now.
- Determine who will take on each role, for how long, and how to decide who will replace them. Rotating different positions gives everyone a chance to build their skillset.

COMMIT TO A PLAN

- Once your tenant association agrees on key demands, decide how you will win them! Make explicit commitments to each other.
- Some common tactics are:
 - Presenting a demand letter, signed by as many tenants in the building as possible
 - Public pressure campaigns to address concerns
 - Coordinated repair requests (and coordinated repair & deducts if the landlord doesn't respond)
 - Stoop watches
 - Rent slow downs/rent strikes
- Figure out contingency plans-- if you are writing the landlord a letter asking him to meet with you, what are your next steps if he says yes? What are your next steps if he says no? At what point will you engage your elected officials to put pressure on the landlord? At what point might you go to the media?
- Make sure you discuss what risks you are or are not willing to take as a group. Being honest about fears and apprehensions builds trust and gives the group an opportunity to find tactics and solutions that work for everyone.

TAKE ACTION

- Nothing is better for empowerment than achieving victories. Start small and humble. If just one tenant needs help, focus your energy there to let them know they matter. This helps build trust with your neighbors-- a main priority of any starting and sustaining a tenant association.
- Larger challenges will someday arrive. If you have trust in each other, experience working with each other, and a cohesive group structure, then when the crisis looks you in the eye, your union will have the strength and wisdom to fend it off together!