



Student Rental Housing During COVID-19: What You Need to Know!

Frequently Asked Questions about Breaking a Lease

- I have a lease, but I'm only taking online classes. My landlord won't let me out of my lease. What can I do?
- Can I break my lease because my campus closed?
- Can I terminate my lease agreement for the remainder of the current lease term since I returned home because of COVID-19? Is the presence of COVID-19 enough to get me out of my lease?
- What should I do if I decide to move out and terminate my lease before the lease term expires?
- I am a student and I signed my lease for the upcoming academic year pre-COVID. I am not returning to campus in the fall, and I want to break my lease.

Unfortunately, Maryland landlord-tenant law does not allow for tenants to break their lease without penalty, except in three circumstances (laws linked below):

- [Active duty military who received a change in duty station \(or are retiring and leaving their current duty station\)](#)
- [Someone with a serious medical condition that precludes them from remaining in their current housing unit. Must be certified by a physician.](#)
- A victim of domestic or sexual assault.

Other Common Questions

I want to terminate my lease but my roommate(s) wants to stay, what are my options?

- It depends on how the lease was written. In most cases, it's the responsibility of the roommate who's leaving to find another person to sublet, but that again depends on the lease and whether the landlord will allow subletting.

How long should I wait to get a response from my landlord?

- You should wait at least 24 hours to receive a response from your landlord, at least 48 hours maximum. If your landlord does not respond within that time frame, then please contact us by filling out this [form](#) or by calling our hotline on Tuesday or Wednesday, from 10 am - 2 pm at (443) 447-7336 and we will direct you to the appropriate resource.

I live in off-campus housing, and my landlord won't make any repairs.

- You could file for rent escrow, depending on the severity of the deficiencies. [Here is a short explainer on rent escrow](#), and [here is the law](#). Depending on which county you live



in, you may also have local laws that apply. [Please contact the Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland](#) if you have questions about county-specific laws.

What responsibilities do landlords and apartment management companies have in preventing the spread of COVID-19?

- Currently, there are no COVID-specific housing laws related to social distancing/masks/cleaning/etc.

My property management company says that because we didn't contact them, our lease renews automatically, even though I won't be living there next semester.

- Unless your lease has a specific auto-renew clause that you and your roommates initialed, your lease cannot renew automatically. This clause has to be a separate line item and not buried in another paragraph. Even if the clause exists, unless it was initialed, it cannot be enforced. [Here is Maryland's residential lease law.](#)

I have a disability and live in off-campus housing. My landlord is saying I have to pay "pet rent" and a security deposit for my service dog.

- Under the Fair Housing Act, if you have submitted certification/documentation from a licensed physician or therapist regarding the need for a service animal, including emotional support animals, a landlord cannot charge a fee for that animal, including "pet rent" or an additional security deposit. [Here is a joint statement from HUD and the US DOJ regarding service animals and reasonable accommodations.](#)

What should I do if my landlord is threatening to evict me because of a COVID-19 outbreak on campus?

A tenant with a valid lease cannot be evicted unless the tenant has failed to pay the rent, or is somehow in breach of the lease.

Assuming the moratorium on evictions has ended on schedule, it should be noted that a landlord cannot evict without filing in court. DIY evictions are illegal in Maryland. Some counties and Baltimore City have their own rules regarding the eviction process, but no county or city allows tenants to be evicted without a judge's order.

Resources for Students

Fair Housing Center Action of Maryland

- If you are a Maryland tenant, or own rental property in Maryland, and need help with a rental housing issue or Fair Housing discrimination, please fill out this [intake form](#).



Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

Legal Resources

- Check your campus student legal aid services!
- [Maryland Legal Aid](#)
- [Public Justice Center](#)
- [Disability Rights Maryland](#)
- [Attorney General of Maryland, Office of Consumer Protection](#)
- [Maryland District Court Self-Help Center](#)