

How do I keep my housing?

Once you're moved in, there are things you can do to help make sure you keep your housing....

Being a Good Tenant

You may not know how to be a “good tenant,” especially if you’ve never lived in your own home before. [You can use the worksheet in our Finding Home guide as a starting place.](#) It includes things you can do to help keep a good relationship with your landlord and neighbors. For any skills you will need help with, think about who can help you with it. This could include a person you know, like a family member or friend. It could also be a program or service.

Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications

If you have a disability, you have a right to ask for reasonable accommodations and modifications that could help you find or keep housing.

A disability is a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Major life activities can include caring for yourself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working.

An accommodation is a change to a rule, policy, practice, or service that provides you with an equal opportunity to use and enjoy your home or meet housing-related requirements. You can request an accommodation from a landlord, a realtor, a condominium association, a housing lender, a housing authority, and any other housing-related person or entity.

Some examples of housing-related accommodations include:

- getting forms in large print, if you have a vision problem
- giving you more time to complete paperwork, if your disability impacts your cognition
- changing the day that rent is due, in line with when you receive a disability benefit payment
- giving you an assigned parking space, if walking distances is a problem

A modification is a physical or structural change to the home you live in or will move into that provides you with an equal opportunity to use and enjoy your home.

Some examples of housing-related modifications include:

- installing a grab bar in the bathroom
- installing a ramp at the entrance to your home
- widening a doorway
- installing a flashing doorbell

Note that the term accommodation is often used to mean both accommodations and modifications.



How to request an accommodation or modification:

1. you can make the request verbally or in writing (in writing is suggested)
2. you do not have to use specific forms (but you can, if they are provided)
3. the person or entity you are requesting the accommodation or modification from may request more information about your disability
4. the person or entity will consider if the request is reasonable (the request is not reasonable if it places an undue financial or administrative burden on the person or entity, or it would fundamentally alter the nature of the program – this is determined on a case-by-case basis)
5. if the person/entity believes that the request is unreasonable, they should talk to you about alternatives

You can use these sample letters when you ask for accommodations or modifications.

Sample of Letter to Request Reasonable Accommodation

www.hud.gov/sites/documents/DOC_7398.DOC

Epic Master List of Disability Accommodation Letters for Housing

www.howtogeton.wordpress.com/sample-disability-accommodation-letters-housing/

[You can the worksheet in our Finding Home guide to think about your need for accommodations or modifications during the housing search process or when you've found housing.](#) It can also help you keep track of your accommodation or modification requests.

If a requested modification is granted, state law requires the person or entity that you requested it from pay for it when you live in publicly assisted housing or you live in a building with 10 or more units. You must pay for modifications in other rental properties, but landlord cannot unreasonably refuse permission to make modifications. If the person or entity refuses your request for an accommodation or modification, or does not respond, you can file a complaint:

Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination

www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-commission-against-discrimination

US Department of Housing and Urban, Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity

www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/online-complaint

More Resources

Keep Your Housing Handbook (pdf)

www.mhla.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/housing.pdf

Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications

www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/reasonable_accommodations_and_modifications



Facing an Eviction

Sometimes evictions happen, even when you're trying to be a good tenant. Things to keep in mind if you think your landlord wants to evict you:

- your landlord can make you move only out if you are evicted - this is a formal process, and simply telling you that they want you to leave does not count
- your landlord cannot force you to leave, change the locks, or shut off your utilities - only a judge can order you to leave
- to start the eviction process, your landlord must give you a Notice to Quit - this will list the date your tenancy will end - the timeline will depend on the reason you're being asked to leave, what type of tenancy you have, and the terms of your lease if you have one
- you do not have to move out on this date - the Notice to Quit is only the first step in the eviction process
- your landlord also must serve you with a Summons - this is a form that tells you your landlord is taking you to court to evict you, the reason for the eviction, when and where the court hearing will be held, and when you must respond by

If you receive a Summons, do not ignore it. Here are some things you can do:

- find legal help to support you through this process, if you can
 - Massachusetts Legal Resource Finder**
www.masslrf.org
- learn about your eviction-related rights
 - Eviction Basics and Notices to Quit**
www.masslegalhelp.org/housing-apartments-shelter/eviction/eviction-basics-and-notices-quit
- request that your case be moved to Housing Court, if it was filed in the district court – Housing Court sessions often have more resources and expertise on housing-related issues
 - Housing Court Information**
www.mass.gov/orgs/housing-court
- file your Answer with the court
 - Massachusetts Defense for Eviction (MADE): Self-Guided Eviction Help**
www.gbls.org/MADE
- prepare for the hearing and go to court on the hearing day

More Resources:

Eviction Information

www.masslegalhelp.org/housing-apartments-shelter/eviction

Tenancy Preservation Program

www.mass.gov/info-details/tenancy-preservation-program

