

City of Concord

A Landlord Guide to Screening Your Applicant

Prospective Tenants

Conducting a proper screening and background check on prospective tenants can be the most important step in renting your property. Owners and managers of rental properties who do not adequately screen prospective tenants are easy prey for dealers looking for a place to sell drugs and conduct other illegal activities. This illegal activity can cost the landlord thousands of dollars.

Activity associated with drug dealing can lead to damaged property, loss of paying tenants, and lawsuits filed against the property owner by surrounding neighbors. The property owner is obligated by law to ensure that activities on their rental property do not create a nuisance or interfere with the peace and quiet of their neighbors. By conducting a thorough screening and background check, landlords can greatly reduce the chances of renting to drug dealers.

Applicant Self-Screening

Applicant self-screening is used to weed out as early as possible applicants planning illegal activity. By using advertisements and clearly posting the rules and regulations on the property, the people with dishonest intentions will quickly understand that your property is not for them.

Advertising

Advertise to reach honest and law abiding tenants. Tell prospective tenants what you are looking for and what you expect. By stating in your advertisement that verifiable references are required and that criminal and drug activity will not be tolerated or accepted, you will eliminate many dishonest people who would have otherwise applied. A well written advertisement can save you time and money. Remember your ad must be presented in the exact same manner to every applicant who applies and must not imply unlawful discrimination.

How to Verify Application Information

A telephone call to past landlords can provide insight into the applicants past behavior. If possible, meet the previous landlords in person to discuss your applicants. Prepare a list of questions to ask the previous landlords. Be sure to ask the most important question of all, "Would you rent to this person again? Why not?" Make sure the applicant's picture identification matches the applicants face and application information. Have a thorough credit check done. Obtaining a credit report provides a way to verify application information. Verify income sources. Get copies of the applicant's last two tax returns. Verify employment information.

Accessing Public Records

Criminal information on prospective tenants can be obtained by contacting the Contra Costa County Superior Court Clerk's Office (in person) at 725 Court Street, Room 127, Martinez, CA. The court will require the name and birth date of the person you want to research. The Clerk will conduct a computer check that provides conviction information of felonies, misdemeanors, and traffic infractions for the past five years (Contra Costa County only). You can reach the clerk at (925) 646-2440.

You may obtain civil information by contacting the Court Clerk at 2970 Willow Pass Road. You can reach the Clerk at (925) 646-5410. The Clerk will allow you to review the criminal or civil files at the window, but you cannot remove it. Bring some paper and a pen to take notes. If you need copies, the cost is \$1.00 per page.

Screening Suggestions

There is no 100% guaranteed system to use to get perfect tenants. However, most problem tenants can be avoided by using good screening techniques. You may want to have a personal interview with each prospective tenant. It's valuable to see how a person reacts when asked questions about application information.

Always look at how the application is filled out. A legitimate applicant will carefully complete the application. Watch out if you receive an application only partially filled out and the person can't remember his last address or landlord. If you find discrepancies in the application, you have an obligation to further question the applicant. If you find out that an applicant has lied or given false information, tell him "No Thank You" and move on the next applicant.

Remember: It's easier to keep a dishonest applicant out of your rental property than it is to evict him once he is there!