

# Tenants' rights: Moving out

## **Author**

Northwest Justice Project

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Learn how and when to give written notice to your landlord before moving out to protect yourself and your deposit.

Form attached:

**Letter to landlord - 20 day notice of move out** (NJP Housing 649)

If you rent a place to live in Washington, your tenancy may not end without proper notice. If you do not provide notice to end your lease, you may be financially responsible for more rent.

Generally, Washington tenants must provide written notice at least 20 days before the end of their rental period (when their lease expires). Some leases may require more than 20 days' notice.

Unless your lease says it does not automatically continue, Washington law assumes that your lease automatically continues as a month-to-month arrangement.

Landlords must have a good reason to end your tenancy and give you a proper written notice.

There are limited circumstances where you can end your lease early with less than 20 days' notice, such as domestic violence, stalking, harrassment, immediate assignment orders in the armed forces, landlord's threats of violence, or the landlord's failure to complete repairs after tenant notice and the statutory timeline has expired.

Your move-out notice may look like this:

To: (*landlord's name*) \_\_\_\_\_

My rental period expires on (*date*) \_\_\_\_\_.

I will move out of (*address*) \_\_\_\_\_ at the end of my rental period.

I'm giving you this notice at least 20 days before my move out date.

Please contact me at (*phone number or email address*) \_\_\_\_\_ to schedule a move-out inspection before my move out date.

Please send my deposit to the following mailing address (*new address*): \_\_\_\_\_.

Giving your landlord a proper move-out notice can protect yourself from financial liability. If you send your notice by certified mail with a return receipt requested (<https://faq.usps.com/s/article/Return-Receipt-The-Basics>), you should get a receipt showing when the landlord received it.

**I have a month-to-month rental agreement. Do I have to tell the landlord I am moving?**

**Yes.** You must send the landlord a letter saying you are moving. The landlord must get the letter at least 20 days before the end of the rental period. Even if your rental agreement is verbal, you should write to terminate your tenancy. You can read this law at [RCW 59.18.200\(1\)\(a\)](https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18.200) (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18.200>).

### **What is the end of the rental period?**

It is the day before rent is due. The day you deliver the notice does not count in the 20 days.

### **My new place isn't ready yet to move in. Should I tell my landlord I'm moving?**

If you are unsure if your new place is ready yet (for example, if you are waiting for a Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection with a Housing Authority), you should wait until your move-in date is finalized before giving your current landlord written notice.

You may not be able to "take back" your move-out notice. Your landlord may not agree to let you stay if your new place does not work out. For example, your landlord may have already agreed to rent your place to someone else.

### **I need to move because I am a victim of domestic violence. Do I have to give 20 days' notice?**

Maybe not. You may be able to end the rental agreement immediately. To avoid owing more rent, you should make a report to a qualified third party or get a protection order and then give written notice to your landlord.

Learn more about how to move out or change your locks because of domestic violence, sexual assault, or harassment.

**The landlord has threatened me with a gun, firearm, or other weapon.  
Can I move out before my lease is up?**

Yes. You can move out immediately. To avoid owing more rent, you should make a report to a qualified third party or get a protection order and then give written notice to your landlord within **7 days** of moving out.

Learn more about how to move out or change your locks because of domestic violence, sexual assault, or harassment.

**I am in the armed forces. I received reassignment orders. I have to move before my lease is up. How much notice do I give the landlord?**

If possible, you must give the landlord at least 20 days' notice of the reassignment or deployment order to terminate your lease early. You can read this law at RCW 59.18.220.

(<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18.220>)

Under RCW 59.18.200(1)(b), (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18.200>) you (or your spouse or dependent) may provide less than 20 days' notice if your permanent change of station or deployment orders do not allow for a 20 day written notice.

**My landlord refuses to complete repairs even though I already requested the repairs in writing. Can I end my lease early?**

Maybe. RCW 59.18.090

(<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18.090>) allows tenants to end

their lease early if they have strictly followed the rules to request repairs. To exercise this right to end your lease early, you must be current on rent. You cannot withhold rent or be behind on rent.

## **I have a lease. I plan to move out when the lease is up. Do I have to tell the landlord?**

If you move out at the end of a lease, your lease may require that you give notice before it is up. If you do not, the rental agreement may turn into a month-to-month agreement. You should give notice regardless. Then you can also notify the landlord of your forwarding address and get your deposit back.

## **What happens if I move out without telling my landlord?**

You may owe rent for the month after you move out or for **30 days** from the day the landlord finds out that you moved.

The landlord must try to rent the unit as soon as they find out you moved. If they can rent it less than 30 days after you moved, you only have to pay for the days the apartment was empty. After the next month, you should not have to pay anything.

## **I did not move when my lease was up. The landlord still takes my rent. We have no new lease. Do I have to tell the landlord when I am moving?**

If you stay beyond the end of a lease and the landlord accepts rent for the next month, you become a “month-to-month” renter. All rules for month-to-month renters now apply to you.

Even if your rental agreement is verbal, you should write to terminate your tenancy. You must provide at least 20 days’ written notice before the end of the rental period. You can read this law at [RCW 59.18.200\(1\)\(a\)](#)

<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18.200>).

### **What happens if I move before the end of my lease?**

You must pay the lesser of:

- Any money owed under an installment payment plan to cover move-in costs plus the rent for all the months left in the lease

or

- all rent owed before the landlord is able to re-rent the unit.

### **What should I do before I move?**

You should give your landlord your new mailing address in writing, ask for a walkthrough inspection, and take photos or video of the conditions of the place after you thoroughly clean it.

Read more about how to [prepare to move out and get your deposit back](#).

### **How do I get my deposit back after I move?**

The landlord has **30 days** after you move out to return your security deposit **or** give you a letter stating why they are keeping any of it. Your landlord must provide written evidence (like receipts or invoices) of how much it cost to repair or clean the rental unit. Read about [deposits and damages](#) and try to [get legal help](#).

**I got a notice to vacate and moved out before the notice time was up.**

**Can my landlord still take me to court?**

Maybe. If you told your landlord you moved out, your landlord should not file an eviction lawsuit against you. But the landlord may still sue you for rent or other damages the landlord says you owe.

If your lease started on or after July 23, 2023, landlords must file a lawsuit for any damages exceeding the amount of your deposit within **3 years** of the end of your lease or abandonment of the premises. Otherwise, your landlord has **6 years** after you move out to sue you for rent owed if you had a written rental agreement. Read about [deposits and damages](#) and try to [get legal help](#).

**The landlord served me with eviction (unlawful detainer) papers. Would moving out right away make the eviction go away?**

**No.** Even if you move, you must still respond to the eviction case (). Otherwise, you will lose the case automatically. You may qualify for a [free lawyer in the eviction case](#) so try to [get legal help](#).

**I moved in a hurry and left some belongings. Can I get them back?**

The landlord may have assumed you abandoned the rental. The landlord can take and store your property if you “abandon” the rental. In some cases, the landlord can move your property to the nearest public space. You abandoned the rental if both these are true:

- You stopped paying the rent.

and

- You acted like you have moved out. **Examples:** You moved all your things out. You stopped sleeping there.

**If your things are worth more than \$250**, the landlord must send written notice to your last known address 30 days before selling them. **If it is worth less than \$250**, the landlord must send written notice **7 days** before the sale. You can read about this in the law at [RCW 59.18.310\(2\)](https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18.310) (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18.310>).

You must write to the landlord quickly to get your belongings back. The landlord may charge for storage fees. You may need to pay the fees before getting your stuff back. You may try negotiating the storage fees, as it may cost your landlord more money to throw away your belongings.

If you do not respond in writing quickly, the landlord may sell or throw away your belongings. If your things are sold, the landlord must apply any value of the sale to any debts owed during your tenancy.

If you do not get your things back by contacting the landlord in writing, you can ask a judge to order the landlord to give your things back and award you up to \$500 for each day your landlord kept your things. You can read about this at [RCW 59.18.230\(4\)](https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18.230) (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18.230>).

**WashingtonLawHelp.org** gives general information. It is not legal advice. Find organizations that provide free legal help on our [Get legal help](#) page.



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To:

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Landlord's Name*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Street address*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*City, state and zip*

Re: Notice of intent to move out  
Certified Mail # \_\_\_\_\_

My rental period will expire on (*date*): \_\_\_\_\_.

I will move out of my rental located at (*address of rental*):

\_\_\_\_\_  
at the end of that rental period. I am giving you this notice at least 20 days before my move-out date.

Please contact me at (*phone number or email address*): \_\_\_\_\_  
to schedule a time for a move-out inspection. Please send my deposit to the following address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sincerely,



\_\_\_\_\_  
*Sign here*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Print name*