



Avoiding Rental Scams

Suggestions from the Housing Services Office



1. If it seems "too good to be true," it probably is and you should beware.

Does the monthly rent for the rental unit seem unusually low or significantly less than market value for the area? Investigate similar rental units in your desired area to determine the approximate rent that you should expect to pay. Trust your instincts, never send money without seeing the rental, stop all communications and walk away from any suspicious situation.

2. Check out who you're dealing with online.

Make sure to meet your prospective landlord or property manager in person before deciding to rent a unit or providing any personal information about you. Before putting any money down, research the individual's name or company online to verify who they are and that the property is being legitimately let:

- Single Family Homeowners – Check with the County Assessor's Office to confirm who owns the property and ask for picture id to ensure the landlord is who they say they are.
 - Pierce County: <https://atip.piercecountywa.gov/app/parcelSearch/search>
 - Thurston County: <https://tcproperty.co.thurston.wa.us/propsql/front.asp>
- Management companies and Limited Liability Companies – Check government sites:
 - Department of Licensing: <https://www.dol.wa.gov/business/checkstatus.html>
 - Washington Secretary of State: <https://ccfs.sos.wa.gov/#/>

3. Avoid unusual forms of payment.

Never use a wire transfer service, such as Western Union, MoneyGram or any Cash Apps, or an online escrow service when sending money (such as for a down payment or security deposit) for a rental unit. Always try to deal locally and never send money overseas.

4. Never rent an apartment/house "sight unseen".

Before sending or paying any money (including by cashier's check), ensure the rental unit's condition, size, features, and amenities match what was described in the listing online by visiting the apartment yourself or by asking a friend to visit for you. Don't fall for "send me the deposit and I will send you the keys".

Common Signs of Online Rental Fraud

1. Landlord in distant location

The landlord or property manager claims to reside far away from the rental unit, often outside the United States and is unavailable to speak by phone or meet face-to-face.

2. Pressure to complete transaction

You are being rushed or unusually pressured into paying a fee, deposit or initial rent amount before you have had an opportunity to view the rental unit.

3. Circumstances hard to believe or rent well below what is common for the area

There is an unusual set of circumstances that attempts to explain why the rent for an apartment is below market value or why the apartment cannot be viewed prior to being rented.

4. No direct contact with landlord

The landlord or property manager is unwilling to meet you in person or speak with you over the telephone.

What To Do If You've Been Scammed

Unfortunately, tracking down scammers is extremely difficult and oftentimes may not result in getting your money back. However, you should still report fraudulent activity as it may aid authorities and companies in tracking down scammers and/or preventing future scams. Following are a few ways to report fraudulent activity:

1. Report it to **local police department**.
2. Report it to the **Federal Trade Commission** (<https://reportfraud.ftc.gov/#/>) or the **FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center** (<https://www.ic3.gov/>)
3. Notify the **website where you found the listing**. Following is contact information and links for reporting scams to some commonly used rental websites:

[11 Commercial URLs removed]*

4. Notify the **Money Transfer Service** you utilized (if applicable)

Complaints on **Western Union** Wire transfers
Western Union Customer Service
1-800-325-6000
executiveresolutionsdept@westernunion.com

MoneyGram

MoneyGram Customer Care Center at
1-800-926-9400

For help vetting a property manager or to get assistance reporting fraudulent activity, contact the Joint Base Lewis-McChord Housing Services Office at usarmy.jblm.id-readiness.list.dpw-rcd-hso@army.mil or 253-967-3581.