

Understanding Safe Healthy Homes Legislation: A Guide for Tenants

Last Updated: March 30, 2026

Right to Safety (Bill No. 250330)

This legislation protects tenants who speak about unsafe conditions. The bill: (1) strengthens anti-retaliation protections; (2) establishes new protections for organizing, habitability, and harassment; and (3) expands good cause protections.

Refresher: Fair Housing Commission vs. Municipal Court

The Fair Housing Commission is a city agency that has jurisdiction to hear unfair rental practice complaints, including complaints about retaliation and good cause challenges. By contrast, the Landlord-Tenant division of Municipal Court is the state court empowered to adjudicate landlord-tenant disputes – namely, eviction actions. If a tenant believes their landlord has committed an unfair rental practice, they have the option of either filing an affirmative complaint in the Fair Housing Commission or raising it as a counterclaim in an eviction proceeding in Municipal Court.

Tenants often opt to have their case heard in the Fair Housing Commission to avoid an eviction record and a costly legal battle. But they only have a limited window to do so. When a tenant receives an eviction notice that they believe is retaliatory or that violates good cause, tenants must challenge that notice with the Fair Housing Commission prior to the landlord filing a complaint with Municipal Court. Once a landlord files in municipal court, a tenant cannot file a complaint with the Fair Housing Commission.

1. Stronger Protections Against Retaliation

How do things work now?

Right now, Philadelphia law says landlords cannot end or change a lease to punish tenants for filing a complaint with Licenses & Inspections (L&I) or organizing with other tenants.

Tenants aggrieved by this section can file a complaint with the Fair Housing Commission or file a counterclaim in an eviction proceeding.

What will change?

The definition of retaliation will be more inclusive. For example:

- The current law prohibits landlords from ending or modifying a lease for retaliatory reasons. The new law will also prohibit landlords from refusing to lease to a person or restricting access to building common areas or building amenities for retaliatory reasons.
- The current law protects tenants from retaliation based on a tenant filing a complaint or joining an association. The new law will also protect tenants from retaliation based on their good faith communications with government officials and/or testimony in judicial proceedings.

Tenants will have additional remedies and opportunities to fight back against retaliation. For example:

- Tenants will be able to file a complaint after they've moved out of their unit.
- Tenants will be able to recover \$1,000 per violation plus attorney's fees, making it easier to find a lawyer to take their case.

2. Establishes New Protections to Protect Tenant Organizing and to Prohibit Landlord Harassment

New Protection: The Right to Organize

- Landlords must confer in good faith with tenant associations
- Non-resident tenant organizers must be treated the same as all other non-resident visitors
- Landlords cannot interfere with lawful tenant organizing activities, such as door-knocking, distributing literature, convening tenant meetings, etc.
- If this provision is violated, a tenant can seek statutory damages of \$1,000 per violation, plus attorney's fees. The attorney's fees provision will make it easier for tenants to find representation.

New Protection: Freedom from Harassment and Interference

- Landlords must provide 24 hours notice before entering units
- Landlords cannot interfere with privileges or amenities promised in the lease (like parking spaces)
- Landlords cannot harass or intimidate tenants by calling ICE or other immigration officials
- Landlords cannot disclose a tenant's medical or health information
- If this provision is violated, a tenant can seek statutory damages of \$1,000 per violation, plus attorney's fees. The attorney's fees provision will make it easier for tenants to find representation.

3. Expansion of Good Cause

What is "Good Cause"?

Good cause is a legal protection that requires landlords to have a valid reason before they can end a tenancy. Landlords cannot simply decide not to renew a lease without justification.

How do things work now?

Currently, Philadelphia has a good cause law, but it only protects tenants with month-to-month leases.

What will change?

Under the Right to Safety legislation, all tenants will be protected by good cause requirements, no matter what type of lease they have.

What counts as "Good Cause"?

Landlords will have good cause to end a tenancy if:

- The tenant repeatedly pays rent late or doesn't pay at all
- The tenant breaks an important rule in the lease (such as harassing neighbors)
- The tenant creates a nuisance or puts other people's health or safety at risk

- The tenant refuses to let the landlord access the unit when needed
- The tenant refuses to sign a lease renewal that has the same terms
- The landlord or their family member wants to move into the unit
- The tenant refuses a rent increase (but the landlord must actually plan to charge the next tenant that same increase)
- The landlord needs to do major renovations (landlords must give 60 days notice and offer the tenant the option to move back in when work is complete)

How does the good cause process work?

Step 1: Notice from Landlord

Landlords must tell tenants in writing why they're ending the lease:

- For leases of one year or more: 60 days notice required
- For leases less than one year: 30 days notice required
- If landlords don't give proper notice: the lease automatically renews

Step 2: Tenants Have Opportunity to Challenge

If tenants believe their landlord doesn't have good cause, they have 15 days after receiving the notice to:

- File a complaint with the Fair Housing Commission
- Notify the landlord that they've filed

Step 3: Eviction is Paused

Landlords cannot move forward with eviction while a Fair Housing Commission case is pending, unless a court finds the tenant filed in bad faith.

Step 4: Court Defense

Even if tenants miss the 15-day window to file with the Fair Housing Commission, they can still raise “lack of good cause” as a defense if the landlord takes them to court.

The Right to Repairs (Bill No. 250329)

This legislation updates the city's rental license and certificate of rental suitability laws to ensure that landlords with serious, unaddressed code violations are not able to evade detection and accountability.

Refresher on current law

Under current Philadelphia law, landlords must:

- Have a valid rental license to collect rent or pursue eviction
- Provide a Certificate of Rental Suitability (CRS) at move-in in order to collect rent or pursue eviction
 - *What is a Certificate of Rental Suitability?* A Certificate of Rental Suitability (“CRS”) is a document that verifies the landlord has no open L&I (Licenses & Inspections) violations. It's meant to ensure tenants are moving into safe, code-compliant units. Under the current law, landlords can self-certify that the property is safe. As long as they don't have any open, unresolved L&I violations, the city will issue a CRS for the landlord.
 - Under the current Certificate of Rental Suitability law, landlords are required to correct certain serious code violations within 30 days. Failure to do so makes them non-compliant with the law and unable to collect rent.

What Will Change

1. Stricter Licensing Requirements

The new law clarifies that landlords cannot get or renew a rental license if they have open L&I violations. This prevents landlords from operating rental properties while ignoring safety problems.

2. Transparency About Licensing and Violations

Landlords must post in a visible place or provide to tenants:

- A copy of their rental license, which will allow tenants to monitor rental license expiration;
- Any notice of license suspension;
- Notice of any unsafe, unfit, or fire code violations by date of required correction

This means tenants will know if their building has serious safety violations and whether the landlord is properly licensed.

3. No Evictions With Outstanding L&I Violations

Landlords must have a current Certificate of Rental Suitability and provide it to the tenant before filing for the Eviction Diversion Program. In practice, this means landlords with open violations cannot evict tenants until they fix the problems.

4. Tenant Right to Request Updated Certificate of Rental Suitability

Tenants can request a new Certificate of Rental Suitability once every 90 days. A landlord will have 10 days to provide a new Certificate of Rental Suitability. If the landlord cannot provide an updated CRS within 10 days (likely because they have outstanding violations), the landlord cannot collect rent until they get a valid CRS.

5. Enhanced Penalties for Non-Compliance

The new law clarifies that tenants are entitled to a refund of rent paid during any period in which their landlord was not legally allowed to collect rent, such as a period where:

- The landlord did not hold a valid rental license, or
- The landlord failed to correct unsafe, unfit, imminently dangerous, or otherwise non-compliant code violations within 30 days as required by the certificate of rental suitability law.

When does the refund period end? In most cases, a landlord is considered back in compliance once they obtain a rental license and/or L&I closes the underlying code violation.

However, if a landlord can show they were unable to obtain a prompt L&I reinspection, the non-compliance period ends on the date the violation was corrected, provided the landlord notifies the tenant and L&I eventually confirms compliance.

In addition, this provision provides for statutory damages of \$1,000 per violation and attorney's fees, which makes it easier for tenants to find a lawyer to represent them.

6. Proactive City Inspections

The city is authorized to create a proactive inspections program. Instead of only inspecting units when tenants complain, the city can conduct regular inspections to catch problems before they become dangerous.