

About Us:

The Worcester Fair Housing Project's mission is to eliminate housing discrimination through education, outreach and enforcement activities in Worcester County. The Project's staff is trained in recognizing both federal and state fair housing issues and is dedicated to assisting individuals in understanding and advocating for their rights under the fair housing laws. The Project also seeks to educate housing providers in understanding their obligations under fair housing laws in order to expand the pool of affordable housing in Worcester County and to eradicate housing discrimination.



WORCESTER FAIR HOUSING PROJECT

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WORCESTER FAIR HOUSING PROJECT

Hoarding & Reasonable Accommodation



A Guide about Tenants' Rights

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What is hoarding?

Hoarding is the uncontrollable urge to collect and keep many belongings in your home.

People who hoard:

- ◇ collect things like newspapers, food, boxes, clothes, and sometimes animals.
- ◇ consider the things they collect to be useful, necessary and valuable, even if those things would not have value to anyone else.
- ◇ will often keep things that create a health or safety hazard for them or others, and may find it extremely hard to throw things out even if they are at risk of losing their housing.
- ◇ are often unable to use their living space fully and comfortably because their tables, chairs, beds, bathrooms and kitchens are covered with their possessions.
- ◇ may be protected by state and federal anti-discrimination laws if their hoarding is the result of a disability.

Hoarding is different from ordinary clutter or messiness. Since hoarding is often related to a disability, people who hoard may need a “reasonable accommodation” in order to remain safely and successfully housed.

What is a reasonable accommodation?

A **reasonable accommodation** is a change in rules, procedures or policies that allows a person with a disability to enjoy the full use of his or her dwelling unit.

To be reasonable, an accommodation:

- ◇ must be related to the tenant’s disability;
- ◇ must be necessary to allow the tenant full use and enjoyment of his or her dwelling;
- ◇ cannot be an undue administrative or financial burden for the housing provider; **and**
- ◇ cannot fundamentally change the nature of the housing provider’s program.

A reasonable accommodation must be allowed by a housing provider when it is requested by a tenant with a disability. The request can be made by the person with the disability or by someone else on his or her behalf, in writing or orally. It does not need to be made on a special form or in a special way. The words “reasonable accommodation” don’t even need to be used in a request for a change in a rule or policy. The person with a disability only needs to let the housing provider know that, because of a disability, he or she needs an adjustment in rules, procedures or policies in order to take full advantage of the rights and privileges of the dwelling unit.

Once this request is made, the housing provider must enter into a process with the tenant to figure out if the accommodation requested is reasonable and, if it is not, whether or not there is an accommodation to help the tenant that **is** reasonable.

It is permissible for the housing provider to ask for verification of the tenant’s disability and for some showing that the accommodation is necessary. The information might be provided by a doctor, case worker or any qualified professional with knowledge of the tenant’s situation; however, the tenant is not required to disclose specifics of the disability or to provide a full copy of his or her medical history.

How can reasonable accommodation help someone who is a hoarder?

Many times a hoarder risks losing his or her housing because the amount of possessions in the home violates sanitary, fire and other health and safety codes, and the landlord or the city threatens the tenant with eviction. A reasonable accommodation may allow a hoarder to remain in the home.

Examples of reasonable accommodations are:

- ◇ Extra time to allow a tenant to clean out his or her apartment in order to pass a housing or subsidy inspection;
- ◇ A payment plan that permits a hoarder to catch up on unpaid rent when the hoarder used rent money for his or her hoarding activities.

If you or someone you know is at risk of losing his housing because of hoarding, you should:

- ◇ Make a plan to address any health and safety concerns or unpaid rent;
- ◇ Ask for a reasonable accommodation that will help you meet the plan;
- ◇ Seek help from any resources that can help you accomplish your plan;
- ◇ Call or e-mail the Worcester Fair Housing Project for advice or assistance in requesting or obtaining a reasonable accommodation.