Watch out for Danger Signs

Never Rent an Apartment You Haven't Seen: It is not good enough for the landlord to show you one "just like it." Don't pay a deposit or sign a lease until you have seen the unit that you will be renting.

Don't rent from landlords who won't give you his or her full name: Don't rent from a landlord who will only give you a P.O. box for an address. Don't rent from a landlord who won't give you a phone number, or who will only give you a pager number. If you have any doubts, ask the neighbors what they know about the landlord. Too further check on the landlord you can also call the city housing inspector, and ask about the property at the address.

Read the Lease Carefully: Make sure you know who pays for the different utilities (gas, electric, water, and sewer). Make sure you know who is responsible for caring for the lawn.

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Watch Out for Discrimination: Under federal law, it is illegal to deny housing to anyone on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, and disability. It is illegal to discriminate against you because of your race, because you have children, or because you are disabled, among other reasons. If you believe that you have been discriminated against, contact your PHA representative or HUD Fair Housing at 1-800- 669-9777.

Lead Paint: If your home or building was built before 1978, the landlord must give you a pamphlet published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) called "Protect Your Family for Lead in Your Home." The landlord also has the responsibility of disclosing to you all known lead-based paint hazards in your unit and any reports from lead inspectors of the health department inspectors that have been made.

The information contained in this brochure applies only in the State of Georgia. In November of 2007 the information contained in this brochure was correct. The law changes and the information in this brochure may no longer be correct. The information in this brochure is intended only as information and does not constitute legal advice. Anyone seeking specific legal advice should contact an attorney. This information was created by the Georgia Legal Services Program.

How Do I Find Housing ?

Finding a good place to live at an affordable price is not easy. You can use the website Georgia Housing Search (www.georgiahousingsearch.org) which contains information on affordable rental units. You can search by area and find a list of units, the unit's bedroom size, the monthly rent and the security deposit charged. This is a great place to start your housing search. If you do not have access to the internet in your home, your local library has computers and internet access that you can use.

When looking for housing you can drive through neighborhoods where you want to live and look for "For Rent" signs. You can also ask friends and relatives, check the classified section of local newspapers, and check the bulletin boards in laundromats and supermarkets.

Factors to Consider in Selecting a Neighborhood

Schools: If you have school-aged children, You will want to consider the quality of the schools that are available.

Safety: Consider the neighborhood and its surroundings. What is the general condition of the neighborhood? Is the unit in a high crime area? Try to find out from the police community relations office how often they have been called to the premises or immediate area.

Work: Consider the distance between your work and the location of the housing unit. If you are looking for work, are there job opportunities in the area?

Child Care: Is there affordable child care in the area? If you work, what is the distance between the housing unit and your child care provider?

Public Transportation: If you do not have a vehicle, what is the access to public transportation in the area?

Child Friendly: Is there a place for children to play outside safely? Do you notice other children playing in the area? Are you close to medical services?

Factors to Consider When Looking at a Unit

Remember that the unit will have to pass an inspection by your voucher provider. Iif you can tell that a unit has maintenance problems, do not waste time requesting that the voucher provider inspect the unit. It is important that you identify the conditions of the unit before you move in. You need to actively inspect the unit. If your landlord states he will make repairs, have him put it in writing and state the date by which the repair will be completed.

General Condition: Is there evidence that the unit has not been well maintained? Is the unit clean and ready to move in? Look in cabinets and under sinks for signs that there might be a bug or rodent problem. If there is an attic, ask if you can look at it. Does it look like there have been animals or bugs living there? Ask your landlord if he has had an exterminator treat the unit recently. If the unit has carpet, examine it closely. Is the carpet clean, does it have a smell? Put your hand on the carpet for a few minutes to check for fleas. If there is furniture in the unit, ask if it will be removed before you move in.

Plumbing: Turn on the water in the sinks to make sure they work and check underneath the sink to make sure there are no leaks. Check to see if there is hot water. Flush the toilet and check for leaks. Turn on the showers and bath to make sure there is sufficient water pressure.

Appliances, Heating and Cooling: Open the refrigerator and freezer, check to see if they are working. Check the oven and stove, turn them on to make sure they work. Do the same with other appliances such as dishwasher or microwave. Check to make sure there is a heater and air conditioner in the unit. Turn them on to see if they work. Ask the landlord to show you the heating and cooling unit. Look to see if they look clean and well-maintained.

Doors and Windows: Is the unit free from serious drafts? Are there broken windows or torn widow screens. Do the windows open and close easily or are they painted shut. Do all windows and doors close and lock securely? Do the entrance doors have secure locks? Are window blinds or curtains included?

Look Around Outside of the Unit: Is there adequate parking for you and your guests? Will you have a designated parking space? Is the area/building well lit at night? Are there private, secure mail boxes? Is the building secure?

Things You Need to Ask Your Landlord

What appliances come with the unit? Are there hookups for washer and dryers?

What utilities are included? Water, electric, gas? What are the costs of utilities? Are tenant-paid utilities separately metered?

How is the unit heated, electric or gas?
Does the landlord provide pest control? How often?

Is garbage pick-up available? Who pays for garbage pick up? When is garbage day? Will I need a special waste can or a recycling bin?

How is rent to be paid: by check or money order? How is it to be delivered to the landlord? When is rent due?

Is there a person to call for normal wear and tear repairs or maintenance? What are the office hours for management and maintenance problems?