

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Charles J Meno I reside in Williston, North Dakota. Thank you for considering my testimony today.

I am testifying in support of HB 1272.

North Dakota law offers very little to no protection for the 37% of North Dakotans who rent in our legendary state. Countless renters end up in financial ruin, have their credit destroyed, and even end up homeless because ND law supports and protects owners, landlords, and management companies, but leaves renters at the mercy of many of these properties owners and managers who choose to defraud, deceive, manipulate, and lie in order to maximize profits - ESPECIALLY at the time of moving out.

One way unscrupulous landlords, property owners and management companies defraud renters financially is to avoid and ignore all contact with a renter once the renter gives notice that they are moving out. They refuse to answer emails, texts, or phone calls, and some won't even open their office door when a renter who is moving out comes to finalize the process.

This evasion causes the renter to not have the opportunity for a final walk-through in which they would be able to take photos or video, and defend or refute accusations of damages beyond normal wear and tear. When a tenant is denied a final walk-through they are defenseless and have no recourse whatsoever if they are overcharged, charged for serious damages which did not actually occur, or are charged for normal wear and tear which is not supposed to be billed to the renter.

It seems that ND law allows landlords, property owners, and management companies to pass on all costs of ownership, including normal wear and tear, onto their tenants when they move out. They do this by denying walk-throughs, charging excessive and outrageous fees, updating their properties by lying about damages, and then sending fraudulent bills that renters cannot afford to pay, and for which renters should not even be responsible, to collections agencies.

I have served the City of Williston for over 5 years initially as a firefighter-EMT and now as a Fire Inspector-Investigator. Currently there are a large number of Williston's first responders that reside within my apartment complex because up until recently, we were provided with a significant reduction of rent costs thanks to the STAR fund, which unfortunately ran out of funds causing our rent costs at very short notice to rise roughly 30% (\$700 to well over \$1000 monthly). This is a topic for another time. I have resided within my complex for roughly 4 years now and unless things change, will likely remain here for some time yet. Doing the math, this means that this complex has made at least 30,000 dollars of income from my living here. This is money that i will never see again and that alone is likely enough to fully renovate at least one or two 2 bed 2 bath apartments here.

As a renter, myself and many of my coworkers are extremely concerned financially when it comes to the eventuality of moving out of the complex. When it comes my situation, living within an apartment long term, you are understandably going to have wear and tear. Appliances, carpets, paint, cabinets, etc. get old or fade with time. I also did a lease takeover from another former coworker who had lived here for a few years before me. I was not provided with a pre-inspection of the apartment and they were not given a post-inspection to my knowledge. Not only will I bear the financial responsibility of wear and tear during my stay, but likely theirs as well. I have heard countless stories of people who have paid professional services to clean/repair their apartments prior to moving out in order to save money and not get hit with outrageous fees, just to still be hit with thousands of dollars of fees for the exact cleaning/repairs that were already made to their apartments.

I implore you, help the citizens of our state as well as our states first responders. We make so many sacrifices to help our communities and keep the citizens of North Dakota safe and make just enough money to make ends meet in the economy. We should not have to live in constant fear of trying to move out of apartments to finally find a home just to be hit with 5, 6, or 7+ thousand dollars in fees that could destroy our savings and financial credibility. I ask you to put yourselves in my shoes when considering this bill. Please do the right thing and provide us with this small bit of protection that could potentially save thousands of renters within our state.

Landlords, property owners and management companies have deep pockets and they have "connections" with contractors, flooring companies, painters, etc. They also have a vast number of ND lawyers on retainer.

What chance does a person who can only afford to rent in ND have against these predatory practices and fraudulent charges?

HB 1272 will not prevent landlords, property owners or property managers from collecting fees for true and actual property damage. It simply evens the playing field some by ensuring that every renter who wants a final walk-through, to

receive one. A final walk-through is essential and should be required so that renters have a voice when they are charged thousands and thousands of dollars upon move out. If the charges are legitimate, the renter should pay. But if they are exaggerated or fraudulent, they should have the opportunity to refute the charges and defend themselves from collections, ruined credit, and even homelessness.

Renters who are fraudulently charged thousands of dollars upon move out who didn't have a final walk-through are very vulnerable to suffering long term homelessness because their ruined credit prevents them from finding another place to rent and call home.

North Dakota can do better than this for the 37% of its citizens who rent!

Please Mr Chairman, and members of the committee, do pass HB 1272. It's the humane and right thing to do. Show your people that you care.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Fire Inspector Charles Meno

Williston Fire Department