

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Stefani LeGrand I reside in Fargo, 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. I rented from a private landlord who sold the property with photos never a walk through and the new company hit me with everything wrong with this place, it is concerning that I was not offered a walk thru when property changed hands. This company did not know what the unit had wrong and what the previous landlord left in the garage and unit. 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 was personally told by email I would be receiving my deposit back but then later when I contacted them about it they responded that the girl who told me I would get my deposit back no longer works there so I would not be receiving any money back.

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. Landlords also work together and make it difficult to correct these issues and when selling property out from under the renter with no notice should not be allowed.

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.

Thank you.