

I am here to express my strong support for HB 1272.

Under current North Dakota law, over 35% of residents who rent, are provided with minimal, if any, protections. This lack of safeguards often leads to renters facing significant financial hardship, damaged credit, and, in some cases, homelessness. The existing laws seem to prioritize the interests of property owners, landlords, and management companies while leaving tenants vulnerable to exploitation. This is especially evident during the moving-out process, when certain property managers and landlords resort to dishonest practices aimed at increasing their profits.

A common scheme involves landlords and property managers completely ignoring tenants who have given notice of their intention to vacate. They refuse to answer emails, texts, and phone calls, and in some cases, even deny renters access to their offices when attempts are made to finalize the move-out process. This deliberate avoidance prevents tenants from conducting a final walk-through of the property. Without this opportunity, renters cannot document the condition of the property with photos or videos, nor can they dispute false claims of damages beyond normal wear and tear.

When renters are denied a final walk-through, they are left defenseless against unwarranted charges. They have no way to challenge exaggerated or fraudulent claims of damages, which can include billing for ordinary wear and tear—something that should never be the tenant's responsibility. North Dakota's laws currently allow landlords to shift the financial burden of property ownership onto renters by denying walk-throughs, inflating charges, and issuing fraudulent bills. These bills often end up with collection agencies, creating a financial nightmare for tenants who are unable to afford the unjustified costs.

Adding to this imbalance is the fact that landlords and property management companies typically have significant financial resources and connections, including relationships with contractors, painters, and legal professionals. In contrast, renters often lack the financial means or legal expertise to combat these predatory practices.

HB 1272 would not prevent landlords or property managers from recovering legitimate costs for real damages. Instead, it introduces a fairer process by requiring landlords to provide a final walk-through for tenants who request one. This step is crucial in ensuring that renters can defend themselves against fraudulent claims and excessive charges. If damages are genuine, renters should pay for them. However, if the charges are unfounded, tenants deserve the chance to contest them and avoid undue financial and credit harm.

Without a final walk-through, renters are at risk of being charged thousands of dollars unfairly, which can lead to credit issues and, in severe cases, homelessness. Damaged credit often prevents these individuals from securing future housing, leaving them in a vulnerable and dire situation.

North Dakota can and must do better for its renters. HB 1272 is a necessary measure that ensures fairness, accountability, and protection for the 37% of North Dakotans who rent their homes.

Mr. Chairman and esteemed committee members, I urge you to support HB 1272. Passing this bill is not only just, but also humane. Thank you for your time and consideration.