

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ryley Lee I reside in Bismarck ND. 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.

When I moved in to my current place I was not able to see my apartment till 2 days after my lease had started. There were damages everywhere in that apartment that had not been noted, when I picked up the keys I was told there was nothing wrong. No one came to the apartment and did a walk through and upon moving in I found not only had the unit not been cleaned, the plumbing that delayed our move it was also not fixed. It is absurd that I was able to move in to an apartment in that condition and its upsetting to think that I still may be framed for these damages even though I promptly took pictures and notified the company.

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.

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.

Thank you.