

Bridging the Digital Divide for Tenants

Support SB 1523 - Senate Housing Committee Bill

The digital divide isn't just about internet access—it's about making sure that people who lack access to or familiarity with technology like smartphones and electronic portals can still meet their fundamental needs, including housing. We have a responsibility to make sure that technological progress does not leave anyone behind.

Basic protections for a digital age include the option to pay by check, the option to apply on paper, and the option to a non-digital key to access facilities. These are low-cost, existing tools that landlords can simply continue to offer to ensure equal access to housing. SB 1523 codifies three requirements for housing providers:

1. Keep the option to pay by check or other commercially reasonable method

Tenants should not be required to pay rent through an electronic portal. Electronic portals are confusing, hard to access on a mobile device, and may fail at critical moments. They may also charge extra fees. And, a typo or simple mistake in a portal could have a serious impact on someone's housing stability.

2. Keep the option of a paper application

Digital applications can be exceedingly difficult to complete on a mobile device or without consistent internet access. Preserving the option of a paper application is an easy way to ensure everyone has an opportunity to apply for housing.

3. Keep the option of a non-digital key

Digital entry systems require that someone have an up-to-date smartphone, which is not the case for ten percent of Oregonians. Tenants must be able to use a physical mechanism such as a keypad, keyfob, or key to enter their home and access any essential facilities such as laundry, parking, trash and recycling.

According to Pew Research, one out of ten people does not have a smartphone, and the number is even higher for seniors, with one out of 4 people over 65 lacking a smartphone.

Implementing these new requirements will particularly benefit seniors, renters with disabilities, and low-income renters, offering concrete support to those who face a greater risk of homelessness. These budget-neutral solutions simply preserve common systems already used by landlords and property managers.

For more information contact: Sybil Hebb, Oregon Law Center, shebb@oregonlawcenter.org; Yoni Kahn, Northwest Pilot Project, yonik@nwpilotproject.org

Bridging the Digital Divide for Tenants

SB 1523 - Senate Housing Committee Bill

