

Bridging the Digital Divide for Tenants

Support SB 1523A - Senate Housing Committee Bill

Amendments worked out with stakeholders, no opposition

Unanimous Senate Committee vote; Bi-Partisan off the Senate Floor

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.

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.

SB 1523A codifies the provision of low-cost, existing tools that landlords can simply continue to offer to ensure equal access to housing:

1. Keeps 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. Keeps the option of a paper or printable application

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

3. Keeps 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.

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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.

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