

Greetings from Chicago and the Illinois Tenants Union

In Illinois most of the tenants live in Chicago metropolitan area. Today there are about 500 000 rental households in the City of Chicago. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Chicago city had 1.0 million occupied housing units in 2003 of which 47 percent were owner occupied and 53 percent renter occupied.

A tenant usually pays a deposit to the landlord as security for the payment of rent. Usually, a tenant pays one month's rent as security. If the landlord does not return the deposit, we will sue the landlord on behalf of the tenant.

50 states - 50 laws

Every state in America has different laws. Especially, the landlord and tenant laws are different from one state to another. In the State of Illinois we have "home rule" for the large cities. Home rule means that every city may pay its own laws. Three cities in Illinois have landlord and tenant "ordinances," which is the name of laws enacted by a city. These three ordinances are based on the Uniform Residential Landlord and Tenant Act, which was adopted in 1972 by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws and approved by the American Bar Association in 1974.

Evictions are frequent

Because there is no rent control or rental subsidy for tenants in Chicago, landlords evict around 30 000 tenants every year. We are able to represent only some of those tenants in court. It is very difficult because the judges want to evict tenants who have not paid their rent.

Chicago has very strict laws about the construction and maintenance of property, but landlords often do not obey these laws. We assist tenants in seeking repairs through legal action in the courts.

The landlord often demands that the tenant sign a residential lease for one year. The tenant cannot move without paying the landlord the whole rent due for the contract term. We assist the tenant in moving and legally not paying any additional rent when the landlord breaks the landlord and tenant law.

ITU, who we are

The Illinois Tenants Union has seven employees. We have four other attorneys who take cases we refer to them. We are not a membership organization. The tenants compensate us for our services. Either they pay us directly or their landlords pay us. The landlord and tenant law says that the landlord must pay damages to the tenant and the tenant's attorney's fees if the tenant wins in court.

The American world view has been called "possessive individualism." In such an environment the tenant movement cannot be developed.

By Michael Pensack, Director.
More info about ITU on www.tenant.org
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