



Tips for Accommodation & Modification Requests

FOR HOUSING PROVIDERS



Residents with disabilities have specific housing rights under Michigan and federal laws. These rights protect against discrimination and allow tenants to request changes or adjustments to their homes to meet their needs. However, the process for making these requests is often unclear, and many tenants don't know their rights for requesting and receiving changes.

Housing providers, landlords, and property managers can help by understanding their legal responsibilities and offering clear guidance to residents. This resource explains these laws and shares tips to make the request process easier for everyone.

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A disability is any condition that makes it harder to do major everyday activities, like taking care of yourself, working, communicating, or learning. Some examples of disabilities protected by law include:

- Visual, speech, or hearing disability
- Mobility disability
- Neurodivergence (like ADHD or autism)
- Chronic disabilities (like cerebral palsy, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, or muscular dystrophy)
- Chronic illnesses (like cancer, heart disease, diabetes, or HIV/AIDS)
- Intellectual disabilities
- Mental health conditions (like depression, anxiety or PTSD)
- In recovery for drug addiction or alcoholism

Reasonable accommodations are changes made to rules or practices to help a tenant with a disability fully use and enjoy their home. Housing providers are typically responsible for these costs.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE

- Providing a reserved accessible parking spot
- Allowing a service or emotional support animal
- Permitting a live-in caregiver
- Offering help to understand communications
- Allowing an exception to the rent payment policy so a resident who receives SSI can wait until after they receive their monthly check to pay rent

Reasonable modifications are physical changes made to a building, shared spaces, private unit, or home to help a tenant with a disability fully use and enjoy their home.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE

- Widening doorways
- Adding a wheelchair ramp
- Installing grab bars in the bathroom
- Lowering kitchen counters
- Lowering coat racks or closet shelves
- Installing a visual fire alarm or doorbell
- Removing carpet

Housing providers must allow reasonable modifications to the property, typically paid for and maintained by the tenant unless the building is publicly funded. If tenants can't afford modifications, check community resources or call the Fair Housing Center of Metropolitan Detroit at (313) 579-3247 for financial help. Providers cannot charge extra security deposits. Providers may also ask for professional plans and permits and are responsible for maintaining modifications in shared areas, like ramps.

Tips to Simplify Your Request Process

Here are a few steps to make the reasonable accommodation and modification request process easier for both housing providers and disabled tenants:

Inform Tenants About Their Rights

Regularly provide new and current tenants with information on their housing rights and how they can request changes. Provide your tenants with informational materials like the City of Detroit's "Know Your Rights Guide" upon move-in and on an ongoing basis. You can also request informational materials from the Fair Housing Center of Metropolitan Detroit. In addition, communicate your process for requesting reasonable accommodations/modifications.

Set Up a Clear Request Process

Create policies that guide staff on how to handle accommodation and modification requests. Though residents are not required to submit requests in writing, you will want to have a clear option for that in place. Whether verbal or written, housing providers should document all requests for reasonable accommodation or modification in a standard way:

- **Provide an address, email, and phone contact** for tenants to submit their reasonable accommodation/modification request.
- **Use Plain Language Forms:** Provide easy-to-understand forms for requesting changes. Using plain language makes communications more accessible, especially for people with cognitive disabilities, lower literacy levels, and English language barriers. The Kelsey offers a free, [open-source template](#) that you can customize.
- **Give a response within 14 days** for non-emergency requests, including an estimated timeline for completing any approved requests.
- **Recognize people are the experts of their own lives.** You can grant requests based on a tenant's explanation of need without requiring extensive documentation. In addition, remember that disabilities vary widely. Even individuals with the same disability may have different needs, and their reasonable accommodation/modification requests may also vary.

Be Flexible

Flexibility makes the process more accessible, and it can decrease tenant turnover! Tenants want to stay longer when providers are flexible and responsive to their needs. Consider:

- **Share Cost:** For modifications that improve the unit's value, work with tenants to share costs or find third-party funding.
- **Negotiate Lease Terms:** Offer longer leases to provide stability for tenants while ensuring steady income without vacancy for housing providers.

Track Requests and Fulfillment

To clearly communicate and comply with fair housing laws, establish a record-keeping procedure to document and track requests. This helps providers identify trends, standardize procedures, improve staff training, and enhance communication, leading to more effective policies and practices that increase accessibility and inclusivity for all tenants.

- **Written Requests:** Ask tenants to submit their requests in writing, or work with them to document their verbal request. This helps create a clear record of what they need.
- **Acknowledge Receipt:** Send a confirmation to the tenant when you receive their request, noting the date and details.
- **Keep a Log:** Maintain a simple log that includes the following.

EXAMPLE LOG

Tenant's Name: Ruby Smith

Date of request: 8/6/2024

Description of the modification requested:
Install a doorbell with a visual signal

Reason for the modification:
To alert the tenant when someone is at the door

Date the request was acknowledged:
8/12/2024

Status: Approved / Denied / In Progress

Justification for the decision:
Improves safety and ability for the tenant to use their home

Any follow up actions or communications:
Notify the tenant, schedule the installation, clarify who handles costs and maintenance, and ensure the work will be done safely

- **Notify Tenant of Decision within 14 Days:** Contact the tenant to let them know the decision made and the reasons for that decision. For non-emergency requests, tenants should be notified within 14 days, including an estimated timeline for completing any approved requests.
- **Track Completion:** Once a modification is approved, track the progress and completion of the work, and communicate progress updates to the tenant.
- **Follow-Up:** After completion, follow up with the tenant to ensure the modification meets their needs.

Train Staff

Train your staff regularly to recognize when a tenant is asking for a reasonable accommodation or modification, even if they don't use those exact words. Staff should know that requests are still valid even if the tenant describes them differently. Make sure there's a clear process for documenting, responding, fulfilling, and maintaining these requests.