

Massachusetts Landlord-Tenant Laws: Rights and Duties for Both Sides

Summary for landlords and property managers. Last reviewed October 29, 2026. Full guide: <https://www.generationadvisory.com/laws/massachusetts-landlord-tenant-rights>

Massachusetts gives tenants strong protections: no late fee until rent is 30 days overdue, rent withholding and repair rights tied to the State Sanitary Code, and a presumption of retaliation for six months after a tenant complains or organizes.

Key points

- No statute sets a notice period, but a lease may allow entry only to inspect, make repairs or show the unit, under a court order, if the unit seems abandoned, or to check for damage near the end of the tenancy.
- If the landlord does not fix State Sanitary Code violations after notice, a tenant may withhold rent and use the conditions as a defense, or in some cases make repairs and deduct up to four months of rent.
- A termination notice, rent increase or major change in terms within six months after a tenant complains, sues or joins a tenant group is presumed retaliatory, and the tenant can recover one to three months of rent or actual damages, whichever is more.
- A lease cannot charge interest or a penalty for late rent until the rent is 30 days overdue.
- No late charge can apply during the first 30 days after rent is due.

Massachusetts at a glance

Rule	Massachusetts	Law
Notice before entry	No statute sets a notice period, but a lease may allow entry only to inspect, make repairs or show the unit, under a court order, if the unit seems abandoned, or to check for damage near the end of the tenancy.	G.L. c.186, section 15B
Tenant repair remedies	If the landlord does not fix State Sanitary Code violations after notice, a tenant may withhold rent and use the conditions as a defense, or in some cases make repairs and deduct up to four months of rent.	G.L. c.239, section 8A and G.L. c.111, section 127L

Rule	Massachusetts	Law
Retaliation protection	A termination notice, rent increase or major change in terms within six months after a tenant complains, sues or joins a tenant group is presumed retaliatory, and the tenant can recover one to three months of rent or actual damages, whichever is more.	G.L. c.186, section 18
Late fees	A lease cannot charge interest or a penalty for late rent until the rent is 30 days overdue.	G.L. c.186, section 15B
Grace period	No late charge can apply during the first 30 days after rent is due.	G.L. c.186, section 15B
Deadline to return the deposit	The landlord must return the deposit, or the balance after lawful deductions, within 30 days after the tenancy ends.	G.L. c.186, section 15B

Mistakes to avoid

- Entering a unit without the notice the lease or the law requires.
- Letting a written repair request sit without a reply or a plan.
- Leaving required disclosures out of the lease packet.
- Applying screening criteria differently from one applicant to the next.
- Raising rent or ending a tenancy soon after a complaint without a documented, unrelated reason.

Verify current law

Laws named in this summary:

- G.L. c.186, section 15B
- G.L. c.239, section 8A and G.L. c.111, section 127L
- G.L. c.186, section 18
- G.L. c.151B, section 4
- Massachusetts Lead Law (G.L. c.111, section 197)
- Residential Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction Act (42 U.S.C. 4852d)

Official sources:

- General Laws of Massachusetts (Massachusetts Legislature):
<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws>
- Mass.gov: The Attorney General's Guide to Landlord and Tenant Rights:
<https://www.mass.gov/guides/the-attorney-generals-guide-to-landlord-and-tenant-rights>

- Mass.gov: Frequently asked questions about residential rental broker's fees:
<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/frequently-asked-questions-about-residential-rental-brokers-fees>
- Massachusetts Trial Court: Housing Court: <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/housing-court>

General information, not legal advice. Check current law and talk to a Massachusetts attorney before you act.
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