

Breaking a Lease in Washington: Tenant Rights and Landlord Options

Summary for landlords and property managers. Last reviewed October 29, 2026. Full guide: <https://www.generationadvisory.com/laws/washington-breaking-a-lease>

A Washington tenant who leaves early usually owes rent only until the unit is re-rented, because the landlord must try to find a new tenant. Survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking and service members can end a lease early.

Key points

- A tenant who enters active military service, or who gets permanent change of station or deployment orders, can end a residential lease early with written notice and a copy of the orders.
- A tenant ends a month to month tenancy with at least 20 days of written notice before the end of a rental period; a landlord needs one of the causes listed in the statute.
- A survivor of domestic violence, sexual assault, unlawful harassment or stalking who meets documentation rules can end the lease early with written notice.
- When a tenant leaves early, the landlord generally must make a reasonable effort to re-rent the unit, and the tenant owes rent only until it is re-rented or the term ends.

Washington at a glance

Rule	Washington	Law
Military service	A tenant who enters active military service, or who gets permanent change of station or deployment orders, can end a residential lease early with written notice and a copy of the orders.	Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. 3955) and Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RCW 59.18)
Domestic violence survivors	A survivor of domestic violence, sexual assault, unlawful harassment or stalking who meets documentation rules can end the lease early with written notice.	Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RCW 59.18)
Landlord duty to re-rent	When a tenant leaves early, the landlord generally must make a reasonable effort to re-rent the unit, and the tenant owes rent only until it is re-rented or the term ends.	Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RCW 59.18)

Rule	Washington	Law
Month-to-month notice	A tenant ends a month to month tenancy with at least 20 days of written notice before the end of a rental period; a landlord needs one of the causes listed in the statute.	RCW 59.18.200 and RCW 59.18.650

Mistakes to avoid

- Billing the tenant for every remaining month without trying to re-rent the unit.
- Ignoring a protected early termination notice because it is inconvenient.
- Agreeing to an early exit by phone without a written agreement.
- Keeping more of the deposit than the lawful deductions.

Verify current law

Laws named in this summary:

- Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. 3955) and Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RCW 59.18)
- Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RCW 59.18)
- RCW 59.18.200 and RCW 59.18.650
- RCW 59.18.650

Official sources:

- Revised Code of Washington (Washington State Legislature): <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/>
- Washington State Department of Commerce: HB 1217 landlord resource center: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/housing-policy/hb1217-landlord-resource-center/>
- Washington Courts: <https://www.courts.wa.gov/>

General information, not legal advice. Check current law and talk to a Washington attorney before you act. Last reviewed October 29, 2026.