

Washington Eviction Process: Notices, Court Steps and Timeline

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

Washington eviction cases are called unlawful detainer actions and are heard in superior court. Landlords need a legal reason to end most tenancies, and a nonpayment case starts with a 14 day pay or vacate notice under the Residential Landlord Tenant Act, RCW 59.18.

Key points

- For unpaid rent, the landlord serves a 14 day notice to pay or vacate on the form the statute prescribes.
- For a material lease breach, the landlord serves written notice giving at least 10 days to fix it or leave; waste, nuisance or unlawful activity allows a 3 day notice to quit.
- A landlord generally cannot end or refuse to continue a tenancy without one of the causes listed in the statute, though narrow end of term exceptions require at least 60 days of written notice.
- Unlawful detainer cases are filed in the superior court for the county where the property is located.
- The summons gives the tenant a deadline, generally at least a week after service, to respond in writing before the court sets a hearing.

Washington at a glance

Rule	Washington	Law
Notice for unpaid rent	For unpaid rent, the landlord serves a 14 day notice to pay or vacate on the form the statute prescribes.	RCW 59.18.057
Notice for a lease violation	For a material lease breach, the landlord serves written notice giving at least 10 days to fix it or leave; waste, nuisance or unlawful activity allows a 3 day notice to quit.	RCW 59.18.650
Ending a tenancy without cause	A landlord generally cannot end or refuse to continue a tenancy without one of the causes listed in the statute, though narrow end of term exceptions require at least 60 days of written notice.	RCW 59.18.650
Where the case is filed	Unlawful detainer cases are filed in the superior court for the county where the property is located.	RCW 59.12 and RCW 59.18

Rule	Washington	Law
Tenant response time	The summons gives the tenant a deadline, generally at least a week after service, to respond in writing before the court sets a hearing.	Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RCW 59.18)
Removal after judgment	Generally, if the landlord wins, the court issues a writ of restitution and the sheriff serves it and carries out the removal after a short notice period.	Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RCW 59.18)
Typical overall timeline	A nonpayment case often takes about six to ten weeks from notice to removal.	Court practice (estimate)

Timeline

Step	Typical time	Rule
Notice period for unpaid rent	14 days	RCW 59.18.057
Notice period for a lease violation	10 days	RCW 59.18.650
Tenant response after the case is served	Set by the court	Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RCW 59.18)
From judgment to removal	Short waiting period	Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RCW 59.18)
Whole case, uncontested	A few weeks	Court practice (estimate)

Mistakes to avoid

- Demanding more than the rent actually owed in a notice for unpaid rent, for example by adding late fees or utilities.
- Counting the notice period wrong and filing a day too early.
- Taking partial rent after serving a notice without knowing how it affects the case.
- Keeping no proof of service. Write down who delivered the notice, how and when, and keep a copy.
- Trying to speed things up with a lockout, a utility shutoff or by moving belongings out.

Verify current law

Laws named in this summary:

- RCW 59.18.057
- RCW 59.18.650
- RCW 59.12 and RCW 59.18

- Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RCW 59.18)
- RCW 59.18.290 and RCW 59.18.300
- RCW 59.18.140, 59.18.700 and 59.18.710 (HB 1217, 2025)

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.