

“Leveling the Playing Field” for People with Disabilities

FAIR HOUSING HIGHLIGHT #29

If a person says that they have a disability, can they get special favors from their landlord that other tenants aren't allowed to have?

People with disabilities may have needs that must be met so that they can have full use and enjoyment of their living space - the same as any other tenant. Called “reasonable accommodations & modifications”, they are not “special favors” but changes to an existing policy, practice, or service a modification to a structural element to make the space physically accessible. Examples of reasonable accommodations would be allowing a person *to have a service or companion animal* even if there is a “no pets” policy, or allowing a person with a mobility impairment *to have a reserved parking space* close to their unit. A reasonable modification might be to allow a person with a mobility impairment *to build a wheel chair ramp or install grab bars in the shower, widen doorways or lower cabinets in the kitchen.*

So, a person with a disability just tells the landlord that they want something to be changed and he/she has to do it? Or do they have to hand over medical records?

Although the person with a disability must provide some verification that a disability exists (if the disability is not immediately obvious) he/she does NOT have to hand over medical records. A person requesting the accommodation/modification must: 1) make the request verbally or in writing; 2) explain the relationship between the request and the disability; and 3) make a “reasonable” request. “Reasonableness” is decided on a case-by-case basis.

What are some common examples of reasonable accommodations & modifications?

- ⇒ moving a resident to another floor for easier mobility
- ⇒ waiving parking fees for a visiting nurse/home health aide
- ⇒ installing TTY in rental office;
- ⇒ changing the date when rent is paid to coincide with date of monthly disability payment
- ⇒ putting notices in large print, audio tape, or Braille
- ⇒ providing oral reminders to pay rent
- ⇒ providing doorbell or phone flasher attachments
- ⇒ simplifying indoor & outdoor locks
- ⇒ having meetings at accessible locations
- ⇒ installing anti-skid tape on floors & stairs
- ⇒ adjusting environmental controls
- ⇒ assisting applicant in filling out forms

Questions? Call the Fair Housing Rights Center in Southeastern Pennsylvania at 215-576-7711 or visit us online at www.fairhousingrights.org.