CA LANDLORD'S QUICK GUIDE: RENTAL SCREENING CRITERIA

Define Your Standards Before You Advertise

Establishing clear, objective, and written screening criteria before you market your property is crucial for attracting qualified tenants, ensuring consistency, and complying with Fair Housing laws. It is best practice (and often required before accepting application fees) to provide these criteria to all prospective tenants. Use this worksheet to think through and document your minimum standards for your rental property. Remember to apply these criteria equally and consistently to all applicants.

Please fill in your minimum standard for each category:

1 Income:

* Minimum verifiable gross monthly income relative to rent? (e.g., 2.5x, 3x rent)

* Required documentation?(e.g., pay stubs, bank statements, offer letter, tax returns)

* My Income Standard: _____ Required Proof: _____

[Ref: E-book Ch 7, pg 20]

2 Credit History:

* Minimum acceptable credit score? OR, key factors considered in the report? (e.g., payment history on rent/utilities, significant recent delinquencies, bankruptcy timing)

* My Credit Standard: _____

[Ref: E-book Ch 7, pg 20]

3 Rental History:

* Require positive references from previous landlords? (How many? Verifying prior landlords is key!)

* Disqualifying factors? (e.g., history of evictions within X years, documented lease violations, unpaid rent/damages to previous landlords)

* My Rental History Standard: _____ Disqualifiers: _____

[Ref: E-book Ch 7, pg 20]

4 Criminal Background Check (Use with Caution - Consult Legal Counsel):

* Will you conduct one? Policy must be non-discriminatory and consider the nature, severity, and time passed since conviction, relevant to property/resident safety. (Must comply with HUD guidance & CA law).

* My Criminal Background Policy (Consult Attorney): _____

[Ref: E-book Ch 7, pg 20]

5 Occupancy Limits:

* Maximum number of occupants per unit/bedroom? (Must comply with state/local code, often 2 per bedroom + 1). Be careful that your limit isn't overly restrictive, as this could violate Fair Housing laws regarding familial status (discrimination against families with children). Ensure compliance.
* My Occupancy Limit: _____

6 Pets:

*Pets allowed? Any restrictions (type, size, breed)? Additional monthly pet rent (if any)? Note: California law generally restricts charging an additional "pet deposit" beyond the standard security deposit limits (AB 12). Always prioritize Fair Housing requirements for assistance animals – no pet rent or deposits are allowed for verified assistance animals.
* My Pet Policy: _____

[Ref: E-book Ch 8, pg 24 & Ch 3 pg 14]

7 Smoking:

* Smoking policy? (e.g., No smoking of any substance permitted anywhere on the premises, including interior and exterior areas).
* My Smoking Policy: _____

[Ref: E-book Ch 8, pg 24]

(IMPORTANT REMINDERS SECTION)

- **Consistency is Crucial:** Apply these documented standards identically to every single applicant.
- **Fair Housing Compliance:** Your criteria MUST NOT discriminate based on any protected class (race, religion, familial status, disability, source of income, etc.). Review Fair Housing laws carefully (See E-book Ch 3) and consult with legal counsel. This applies to setting criteria (like occupancy limits) and evaluating applicants.
- **Written Policies:** Keep this documented criteria sheet for your business records. Make criteria available to applicants as appropriate/required before accepting fees.

Disclaimer: This checklist is a tool for defining standards and is for informational purposes only. It does not constitute legal advice. All screening criteria and practices must comply fully with federal, state (California), and local Fair Housing and landlord-tenant laws, which are subject to change. Landlords are strongly encouraged to consult with qualified legal counsel to review their specific screening policies and ensure compliance before implementation.