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Landlords can't evict a tenant on grounds of race or color — but they can because of length of hair.

Residential landlord/tenant act outlines renter rights, remedies

By LISA ERB

A landlord can't discriminate against a tenant because of race or color, according to Oregon landlord-tenant laws.

But that doesn't prevent a landlord from evicting a tenant because of the length of his hair.

Because almost three-quarters of University students live off campus, and much of the rental housing available in Eugene is inhabited by students, it is important that student tenants are aware of the Oregon Residential Landlord and Tenant Act (ORS 91.700-91.990), which governs current rental leases and periodic agreements.

Students should also be aware of their responsibilities as tenants, and legal actions they can take if they suspect they have been discriminated against, or if a landlord has been noncompliant with a rental contract.

There are remedies which a student can use to enforce his/her rights as a tenant. One of the first steps a student should take is to contact the ASUO Off-Campus Housing Office about the problem.

According to Tony Sweet, a para-legal counselor there, "We would be the best and easiest

place for a student with a legal problem to come to initially, and then we could provide direction to another source of help if necessary."

Reasons for tenants taking legal action against their landlords could include any breach of contract by the landlord, unfair deposit loss, any essential services being denied (these can be determined by housing, fire or health inspectors), and any physical and emotional distress caused by the landlord, including deliberately locking a tenant out, shutting off the tenant's utility service, destroying a tenant's property, and violating the habitability provisions of the act.

A tenant can also take legal action if the landlord discriminates "in selling, renting or leasing property on the basis of race, color, sex, marital status, religion or national origin."

However, a tenant may not pursue a remedy until he/she has first notified the landlord in writing, and allowed a reasonable amount of time for correction of the situation. Also, a tenant should prepare proof of the problem by writing everything down and possibly getting photographs of the problem site and repair estimates.

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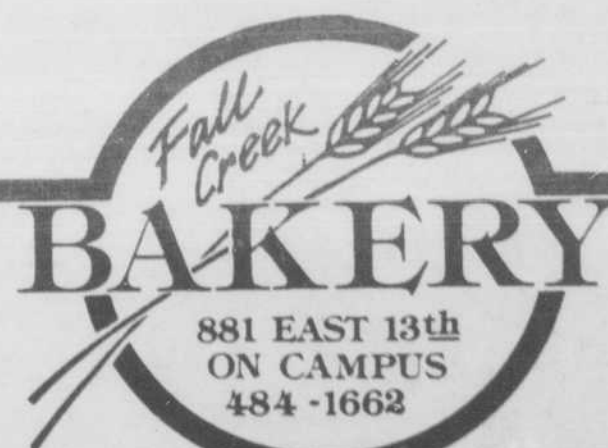
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