

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 2019 SESSION

CHAPTER 477

An Act to amend and reenact §§ 16.1-88.03, 55-246.1, and 55-248.4 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the managing agent of a landlord.

[H 2262]

Approved March 18, 2019

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 16.1-88.03, 55-246.1, and 55-248.4 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 16.1-88.03. Pleadings and other papers by certain parties not represented by attorneys.

A. Any corporation, partnership, limited liability company, limited partnership, professional corporation, professional limited liability company, registered limited liability partnership, registered limited liability limited partnership or business trust and the Department of Military Affairs, when the amount claimed in any civil action pursuant to subdivision (1) or (3) of § 16.1-77 does not exceed the jurisdictional amounts authorized in such subsections, exclusive of interest, may prepare, execute, file, and have served on other parties in any proceeding in a general district court a warrant in debt, motion for judgment, warrant in detinue, distress warrant, summons for unlawful detainer, counterclaim, crossclaim, suggestion for summons in garnishment, garnishment summons, writ of possession, writ of fieri facias, interpleader and civil appeal notice without the intervention of an attorney. Such papers may be signed by a corporate officer, a manager of a limited liability company, a general partner of any form of partnership or a trustee of any business trust, or such corporate officer, with the approval of the board of directors, or manager, general partner or trustee may authorize in writing an employee, a person licensed under the provisions of § 54.1-2106.1, ~~a or the property manager;~~ or ~~a the~~ managing agent of a landlord as defined in § 55-248.4 *pursuant to the written property management agreement* to sign such papers as the agent of the business entity. Only an agency employee designated in writing by the Adjutant General may sign such papers on behalf of the Department of Military Affairs. However, this section shall not apply to an action under subdivision (1) or (3) of § 16.1-77 which was assigned to a corporation, partnership, limited liability company, limited partnership, professional corporation, professional limited liability company, registered limited liability partnership, registered limited liability limited partnership or business trust, or individual solely for the purpose of enforcing an obligation owed or right inuring to another.

B. Nothing in this section shall allow a nonlawyer to file a bill of particulars or grounds of defense or to argue motions, issue a subpoena, rule to show cause, or *capias*; file or interrogate at debtor interrogatories; or to file, issue or argue any other paper, pleading or proceeding not set forth in subsection A.

C. The provisions of § 8.01-271.1 shall apply to any pleading, motion or other paper filed or made pursuant to this section.

D. Parties not represented by counsel, and who have made an appearance in the case, shall promptly notify in writing the clerk of court wherein the litigation is pending, and any adverse party, of any change in the party's address necessary for accurate mailing or service of any pleadings or notices. In the absence of such notification, a mailing to or service upon a party at the most recent address contained in the court file of the case shall be deemed effective service or other notice.

§ 55-246.1. Who may recover rent or possession.

Notwithstanding any rule of court to the contrary, (i) any person licensed under the provisions of § 54.1-2106.1, (ii) any property manager, ~~or a the~~ managing agent of a landlord as defined in § 55-248.4 *pursuant to the written property management agreement*, or (iii) any employee, who is authorized in writing by a corporate officer with the approval of the board of directors, or by a manager, a general partner or a trustee, of a partnership, association, corporation, limited liability company, limited partnership, professional corporation, professional limited liability company, registered limited liability partnership, registered limited liability limited partnership, business trust, or family trust to sign pleadings as the agent of the business entity may obtain a judgment (a) for possession in the general district court for the county or city wherein the premises, or part thereof, is situated or (b) for rent or damages, including actual damages for breach of the rental agreement, or for final rent and damages under § 8.01-128, in any general district court where venue is proper under § 8.01-259, against any defendant if the person seeking such judgment had a contractual agreement with the landlord to manage the premises for which rent or possession is due and may prepare, execute, file, and have served on other parties in any general district court a warrant in debt, suggestion for summons in garnishment, garnishment summons, writ of possession, or writ of fieri facias arising out of a landlord tenant relationship. However, the activities of any such person in court shall be limited by the provisions of

§ 16.1-88.03. However, nothing shall be construed as preventing a nonlawyer from requesting relief from the court as provided by law or statute when such nonlawyer is before the court on one of the actions specified herein.

§ 55-248.4. Definitions.

When used in this chapter, unless expressly stated otherwise:

"Action" means recoupment, counterclaim, set off, or other civil suit and any other proceeding in which rights are determined, including without limitation actions for possession, rent, unlawful detainer, unlawful entry, and distress for rent.

"Application deposit" means any refundable deposit of money, however denominated, including all money intended to be used as a security deposit under a rental agreement, or property, which is paid by a tenant to a landlord for the purpose of being considered as a tenant for a dwelling unit.

"Application fee" means any nonrefundable fee, which is paid by a tenant to a landlord or managing agent for the purpose of being considered as a tenant for a dwelling unit. An application fee shall not exceed \$50, exclusive of any actual out-of-pocket expenses paid by the landlord to a third party performing background, credit, or other pre-occupancy checks on the applicant. However, where an application is being made for a dwelling unit which is a public housing unit or other housing unit subject to regulation by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, an application fee shall not exceed \$32, exclusive of any actual out-of-pocket expenses paid to a third party by the landlord performing background, credit, or other pre-occupancy checks on the applicant.

"Assignment" means the transfer by any tenant of all interests created by a rental agreement.

"Authorized occupant" means a person entitled to occupy a dwelling unit with the consent of the landlord, but who has not signed the rental agreement and therefore does not have the financial obligations as a tenant under the rental agreement.

"Building or housing code" means any law, ordinance or governmental regulation concerning fitness for habitation, or the construction, maintenance, operation, occupancy, use or appearance of any structure or that part of a structure that is used as a home, residence or sleeping place by one person who maintains a household or by two or more persons who maintain a common household.

"Commencement date of rental agreement" means the date upon which the tenant is entitled to occupy the dwelling unit as a tenant.

"Dwelling unit" means a structure or part of a structure that is used as a home or residence by one or more persons who maintain a household, including, but not limited to, a manufactured home.

"Effective date of rental agreement" means the date upon which the rental agreement is signed by the landlord and the tenant obligating each party to the terms and conditions of the rental agreement.

"Facility" means something that is built, constructed, installed or established to perform some particular function.

"Good faith" means honesty in fact in the conduct of the transaction concerned.

"Guest or invitee" means a person, other than the tenant or person authorized by the landlord to occupy the premises, who has the permission of the tenant to visit but not to occupy the premises.

"Interior of the dwelling unit" means the inside of the dwelling unit, consisting of interior walls, floor, and ceiling, that enclose the dwelling unit as conditioned space from the outside air.

"Landlord" means the owner, lessor or sublessor of the dwelling unit or the building of which such dwelling unit is a part. "Landlord" also includes a managing agent of the premises who fails to disclose the name of such owner, lessor or sublessor. Such managing agent shall be subject to the provisions of § 16.1-88.03. Landlord shall not, however, include a community land trust as defined in § 55-221.1.

"Managing agent" means ~~a~~ *the* person authorized by the landlord to act ~~as the property manager~~ *on behalf of the landlord under an* pursuant to the written property management agreement.

"Mold remediation in accordance with professional standards" means mold remediation of that portion of the dwelling unit or premises affected by mold, or any personal property of the tenant affected by mold, performed consistent with guidance documents published by the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (the Bioaerosols Manual), Standard Reference Guides of the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration for Water Damage Restoration and Professional Mold Remediation, or any protocol for mold remediation prepared by an industrial hygienist consistent with said guidance documents.

"Multifamily dwelling unit" means more than one single-family dwelling unit located in a building. However, nothing in this definition shall be construed to apply to any nonresidential space in such building.

"Natural person," wherever the chapter refers to an owner as a "natural person," includes co-owners who are natural persons, either as tenants in common, joint tenants, tenants in partnership, tenants by the entirety, trustees or beneficiaries of a trust, general partnerships, limited liability partnerships, registered limited liability partnerships or limited liability companies, or any lawful combination of natural persons permitted by law.

"Notice" means notice given in writing by either regular mail or hand delivery, with the sender retaining sufficient proof of having given such notice, which may be either a United States postal

certificate of mailing or a certificate of service confirming such mailing prepared by the sender. However, a person shall be deemed to have notice of a fact if he has actual knowledge of it, he has received a verbal notice of it, or from all of the facts and circumstances known to him at the time in question, he has reason to know it exists. A person "notifies" or "gives" a notice or notification to another by taking steps reasonably calculated to inform another person whether or not the other person actually comes to know of it. If notice is given that is not in writing, the person giving the notice has the burden of proof to show that the notice was given to the recipient of the notice.

"Organization" means a corporation, government, governmental subdivision or agency, business trust, estate, trust, partnership or association, two or more persons having a joint or common interest, or any combination thereof, and any other legal or commercial entity.

"Owner" means one or more persons or entities, jointly or severally, in whom is vested:

1. All or part of the legal title to the property, or
2. All or part of the beneficial ownership and a right to present use and enjoyment of the premises, and the term includes a mortgagee in possession.

"Person" means any individual, group of individuals, corporation, partnership, business trust, association or other legal entity, or any combination thereof.

"Premises" means a dwelling unit and the structure of which it is a part and facilities and appurtenances therein and grounds, areas and facilities held out for the use of tenants generally or whose use is promised to the tenant.

"Processing fee for payment of rent with bad check" means the processing fee specified in the rental agreement, not to exceed \$50, assessed by a landlord against a tenant for payment of rent with a check drawn by the tenant on which payment has been refused by the payor bank because the drawer had no account or insufficient funds.

"Readily accessible" means areas within the interior of the dwelling unit available for observation at the time of the move-in inspection that do not require removal of materials, personal property, equipment or similar items.

"Rent" means all money, other than a security deposit, owed or paid to the landlord under the rental agreement, including prepaid rent paid more than one month in advance of the rent due date.

"Rental agreement" or "lease agreement" means all agreements, written or oral, and valid rules and regulations adopted under § 55-248.17 embodying the terms and conditions concerning the use and occupancy of a dwelling unit and premises.

"Rental application" means the written application or similar document used by a landlord to determine if a prospective tenant is qualified to become a tenant of a dwelling unit. A landlord may charge an application fee as provided in this chapter and may request a prospective tenant to provide information that will enable the landlord to make such determination. The landlord may photocopy each applicant's driver's license or other similar photo identification, containing either the applicant's social security number or control number issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles pursuant to § 46.2-342. However, a landlord shall not photocopy a U.S. government-issued identification so long as to do so is a violation of Title 18 U.S.C. Part I, Chapter 33, § 701. The landlord may require that each applicant provide a social security number issued by the U.S. Social Security Administration or an individual taxpayer identification number issued by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, for the purpose of determining whether each applicant is eligible to become a tenant in the landlord's dwelling unit.

"Roomer" means a person occupying a dwelling unit that lacks a major bathroom or kitchen facility, in a structure where one or more major facilities are used in common by occupants of the dwelling unit and other dwelling units. Major facility in the case of a bathroom means toilet, and either a bath or shower, and in the case of a kitchen means refrigerator, stove, or sink.

"Security deposit" means any refundable deposit of money that is furnished by a tenant to a landlord to secure the performance of the terms and conditions of a rental agreement, as a security for damages to the leased premises, or as a pet deposit. However, such money shall be deemed an application deposit until the commencement date of the rental agreement. Security deposit shall not include a damage insurance policy or renter's insurance policy as those terms are defined in § 55-248.7:2 purchased by a landlord to provide coverage for a tenant.

"Single-family residence" means a structure, other than a multi-family residential structure, maintained and used as a single dwelling unit, condominium unit, or any other dwelling unit that has direct access to a street or thoroughfare and shares neither heating facilities, hot water equipment, nor any other essential facility or service with any other dwelling unit.

"Sublease" means the transfer by any tenant of any but not all interests created by a rental agreement.

"Tenant" means a person entitled only under the terms of a rental agreement to occupy a dwelling unit to the exclusion of others and shall include roomer. Tenant shall not include (i) an authorized occupant, (ii) a guest or invitee, or (iii) any person who guarantees or cosigns the payment of the financial obligations of a rental agreement but has no right to occupy a dwelling unit.

"Tenant records" means all information, including financial, maintenance, and other records about a tenant or prospective tenant, whether such information is in written or electronic form or other medium.

A tenant may request copies of his tenant records pursuant to § 55-248.9:1.

"Utility" means electricity, natural gas, water and sewer provided by a public service corporation or such other person providing utility services as permitted under § 56-1.2. If the rental agreement so provides, a landlord may use submetering equipment or energy allocation equipment as defined in § 56-245.2, or a ratio utility billing system as defined in § 55-226.2.

"Visible evidence of mold" means the existence of mold in the dwelling unit that is visible to the naked eye by the landlord or tenant in areas within the interior of the dwelling unit readily accessible at the time of the move-in inspection.

"Written notice" means notice given in accordance with § 55-248.6, including any representation of words, letters, symbols, numbers, or figures, whether (i) printed in or inscribed on a tangible medium or (ii) stored in an electronic form or other medium, retrievable in a perceivable form, and regardless of whether an electronic signature authorized by Chapter 42.1 (§ 59.1-479 et seq.) of Title 59.1 is affixed. The landlord may, in accordance with a written agreement, delegate to a managing agent or other third party the responsibility of providing any written notice required by this chapter.