



First-in-Time Applicant Screening

In an unanimous vote on August 8, 2016, the Seattle City Council created a first of its kind, [First-In-Time policy](#). First-In-Time policy. Though the law took effect January 1, 2017, [enforcement of the First-in-Time provisions begins July 1.](#) The law is applicable to rental properties [in the City of Seattle only](#).

The law requires a housing provider to screen the first applicant that provides a completed application and, if the applicant qualifies per the pre-determined screening criteria, offer tenancy to that applicant. There are three important components to this law:

I. Screening Criteria

First-in-Time adds to the State's screening criteria requirements. The following must be included in all screening criteria for properties in the City of Seattle:

- Disclosure of the minimum threshold for each criterion used to screen an applicant in the written screening criteria.
- If the property includes rent restricted units, such as MFTE, the screening criteria must identify the different or additional criteria used for these rent restricted units.
- All information, documentation and other submissions necessary to complete applicant screening (including those documents associated with an individualized assessment).
- How to request additional time to complete the application. The law permits a request for additional because of a reasonable accommodation or because of a request for meaningful access. "Meaningful access" is defined as the need to obtain language translation assistance. The housing provider is not required to provide language translation services.

WMFHA collected some of our member's screening criteria from various properties across Seattle, combined common pieces and added Seattle specific requirements. This [screening criteria](#) includes comments on Seattle specific information.

II. Advertising

All advertising of an available apartment home on any website must include direct access to the screening criteria. The Office of Civil Rights has determined by rule, that the advertisement may include the full text or a hyperlink to the required information. The hyperlink must be obvious in the advertisement and must take the applicant directly to the screening criteria. The hyperlink cannot take the applicant to the home page of the property.

In addition, all property websites that advertise available apartment homes must include a direct link to the screening criteria. For example, below the link to "Availability" on a website's homepage, there must be a direct link to the screening criteria. (Note: the law does not specify where on the website to place a link to the screening criteria, just that the link be conspicuous and self-evident.)

III. Selecting a Resident

First, after accepting a completed application, the housing provider must date and time stamp the application.

All applications must be screened in the order they are received. The law does not limit making a unit unavailable while screening the first applicant.

If, after screening the applicant, the housing provider needs more information (i.e. conditional approval), the housing provider may request additional information by telephone, in writing, or in person and must provide at least 72 hours for the applicant to provide the information.

The housing provider must provide qualified applicants with 48 hours to accept any offer.

An applicant may request additional time to complete an application or request meaningful access. If additional time is requested, the date and time of the completed application is the date and time of the request for additional time.

- The housing provider may request reasonable documentation to support a request for meaningful access with the completed application. Requests for reasonable accommodations are governed by the Federal Fair Housing Act.

Additional information about Seattle's First-in-Time law can be found at the [Seattle Office for Civil Rights' website](#). For more information contact Brett Waller at brett@wmfha.org.