Ohio Legal Help

State-Wide Website User Testing

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Findings and Analysis

April 2, 2018

Introduction

From March 19th- 23rd, Susan Choe and Rachel Harris from the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation conducted 23 user tests with constituents in five different Ohio counties. Laura Quinn designed the test process and conducted the analysis. The purpose of the tests was to understand how the participants used four different state-wide websites: Illinois (IllinoisLegalAid.org), Maine (www.plta.org), Michigan (michiganlegalhelp.org), and New York (www.lawhelpny.org). We investigated how users navigated through the site and looked for answers based on two different scenarios—one concerning eviction, and one concerning security deposits.

We specifically wanted to test with low income Ohioans, and thus partnered with five different local community organizations. The tests were conducted at onsite at these partner organizations at times when low income residents would be there in person for a specific reason (for instance, to apply for heating assistance, or to get help with taxes). A representative of the location organization presented the opportunity to those waiting to participate in user tests in exchange for a $10 gift card. See the Methodology Details for more details of the partner organizations, specific recruiting techniques, and the demographics of the recruited participants.

We did not gather specific income demographics from the participants, but we estimate that well over 50% of our participants were at 175% of poverty or below, and then vast majority were at 300% of poverty or below. Our tests represent a reasonable cross-section of urban/ suburban/ rural/ very rural residents, different ages, and different levels of experience using the internet. We did, however, have trouble recruiting male testers—of our 23 tests, only three were with men—meaning that it's possible that these test results are more representative of women than men. See Appendix A: Recruiting and Demographics section for more information.

Each user test was about 20-30 minutes long and started with some general questions about a legal issue that they had researched in the past. We then asked each to pretend they were in one of two situations—either that they were presented with an eviction letter, or that they hadn't received their security deposit back after three months. We asked each participant what they would first do if they found themselves in that scenario and how they would look for information online.

We then asked each user to navigate two of four state-wide websites. These sites were chosen to present a variety of different high quality navigational and content experiences to the users. We rotated through the Maine, Illinois, and Michigan sites to approximately randomize the number of users who saw each and in what order. The New York site was shown to fewer users (only four), and always as the first site seen.

Based on what the participant said they would look for online, we showed them either the homepage or the appropriate content page of the first of the sites and asked them to see if they could use the site to figure out what action they should take next (in regard to their eviction letter or security deposit). We then asked to repeat the exercise on a second site. If they hadn't gone through triage, we asked them specifically to click on start triage and see if it was helpful for their situation.

Finally, we asked them which of the sites they found to be most friendly, and if they would use a site like these for Ohio.

See the Appendix B: Facilitation Guide for the detailed questions used for the interview

We analyzed our tests for findings that could be applied to a new Ohio state-wide site. The findings are outlined here in seven sections:

1. Initial Paths to Help
2. Finding Online Resources
3. Content Pages
4. Overall Site Structure and Navigation
5. Homepage
6. Triage
7. Differences by Demographic
8. Overall Preferences

Appendix C includes screen shots of each of the sites (homepage, triage, and the two content pages that participants started on) as they looked the week after testing.

1. Initial Paths to Help

We asked two different sets of questions to help determine how the participants thought about finding help for a legal issue. We first asked them if they had ever faced a legal issue in the past, and if so how they went about researching information to deal with it. We then posed a specific scenario for them to envision themselves in and asked them what they would do first to take action.

There's widely different approaches to who constituents initially reach out to when faced with a legal issue, but non-legal social sector organizations are a critical part of the mix—at least for our participants.

Each interviewee was asked if they had ever dealt with a legal issue. Of the 21 who said that they had, eight of them started by reaching out to a social safety net or government organization, five of them contacted a lawyer, four of them went online, two reached out directly to a legal aid organization, one went to the bar, and one to the library. As the participants had by definition shown up in person at a social safety net organization in order to be recruited, it's reasonable to suspect that they may be more likely to seek that kind of help than our target audience as a whole.

Are people more likely to look for lawyers, or self-help information? Of those who would start with either one, somewhat more mentioned lawyers, but a notable number would also start with online research.

When faced with one of our two legal scenarios (eviction or getting a security deposit back), nine mentioned reaching out to a social safety net or government organization for help (CAA, MCDJFS, CMHA); six mentioned using the internet to research information; six mentioned reaching out to lawyers.

Once given a scenario and asked to use one of the state websites to determine what they would do next, only five of the 23 users were clearly focused on finding a lawyer as opposed to self-help information. This could have been greatly influenced by the sites themselves, which largely put self-help information forward more prominently.

An eviction letter from a landlord, when rent was past due, was generally viewed as a personal debt issue rather than one on which legal information would be useful.

When we asked people what they would first do if a landlord had not returned a security deposit after three months, 67% (eight of 12) mentioned lawyers, legal rights, or courts as one of their first steps. However, only 20% mentioned any legal step for the eviction scenario, in which the landlord had slipped a letter under their door threatening eviction after they hadn't paid rent in two months. Instead, 60% mentioned reaching out to try to raise money to pay their back rent, or even simply looking for a new place to live, as their primary activity. We hypothesize that eviction scenario we used did not resonate as legal (even though we were asking specifically about legal issues) because the landlord was not obviously "in the wrong." This echoes findings from earlier studies, such as Rebecca L. Sandefur's *Accessing Justice in the Contemporary USA: Findings from the Community Needs and Services*[1] study, that people often do not realize that legal information might be applicable.

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[1] http://www.americanbarfoundation.org/uploads/cms/documents/sandefur_accessing_justice_in_the_contemporary_usa._aug._2014.pdf

2. Finding Internet Resources

Most users expect to go from Google to a website page with information about a specific content area—as opposed to going through the homepage. However, important traffic will also come through the homepage.

When asked where they would go online, only five of 22 users mentioned a course of action that would be more likely to lead them to a home page than a content page for a specific topic. More than half—13 of them—mentioned searching on Google specifically. 11 of them mentioned specifically searching Google for a keyword phrase describing their precise legal issue.

This does, however, leave five users who would have been more likely to find the homepage even when searching the web—and this doesn't include those who are already familiar with the site or hear about it from a partner.

Users did not think of geography or jurisdiction as an important piece of Google search terms.

Of the 19 users who said they would search for information online and provided search terms, only a single one included any state or county in what they said they would search for (that term was "Ohio State law fair renting practices").

Other than lack of jurisdiction, the majority phrased their search queries in ways that were reasonably likely to return specific content on their topic.

68% (13 of 19) who those who provided search phrases to find information (rather than a lawyer) included specific keywords (such as "eviction" or "security deposit") that had a reasonable chance of finding good results. A number of these search terms were quite well framed ("what is the starting process of evictions"; "landlord withholding security deposit without reason"; "how to make your landlord pay your deposit back").

Another four provided quite general queries ("tenant's rights"; "rental help"; "landlord obligations"; "how to take someone to court), while the last respondent focused on finding the right organization ("BBB"; "housing authority").

3. Content Pages

Users reacted well to content displayed in a step-by-step format and seemed to be able to read it effectively.

Both the Maine and the Illinois site had a numbered step-by-step breakdown as to what to do to get a security deposit back. Seven of the eight users who saw one of these two pages specifically commented that they liked the step-by-step format.

The Maine page we showed users for the security deposit scenario has a sidebar format that was formatted with a "checklist" graphic design. This drew users' eye more than other sidebars—more users clicked on this sidebar (five) than any other single link on any content page. The next most common link was in the main content area of the page and had three clicks; no other sidebar link on any site was clicked more than once.

Users reacted well to the expandable headers on the New York website.

All four users who saw the New York content page were able to successfully navigate the headers with plus signs to find useful content. Three of the four specifically said they liked the format of the page

Not all users saw links in side navigation bars—but they were more likely to notice them on some sites than others.

While some users certainly did click on links show in columns to the left or right of the main content area, it was clear that others were not scanning that information at all. As an example where users had more difficulty, the Michigan site's primary page about security deposits had the most relevant content for our scenario in a right navigation bar —an article "Your Security Deposit: What It Is and How To Get It Back" and a form "Do-It-Yourself

Letter to Landlord (Security Deposit)." Only one person clicked on either of those links (they clicked on the article), while three people clicked on links that seemed less related, but which were in the center of the content area.

While Illinois, Michigan, and Maine all had key information in prominent side navigation bars, our participants were much more likely to use it the Maine site than others. Of 11 total clicks on content on the Maine site, 8 of them were on the side navigation. In comparison, of six people who clicked on content on each of the Illinois and Michigan, only two clicked on the Illinois side bar content and only one on the Michigan side bar content.

We don't have enough information to know why there was such a substantial difference, but from anecdotally considering the way that people were scanning the site, we suspect it may be because the Maine side bars tend to be less visually separated from the content area. Perhaps with less visual separation, these side columns are more likely to appear like "main" content that should be scanned just like the center content.

For those who didn't succeed in finding the answer to their question, the primary reasons were some combination of being overwhelmed by the number of links on the page, clicking on a not-so-relevant link, and not seeing the most clearly applicable links.

Of 37 interactions on a specific content page, seven people did not succeed in finding the answer to their question. There was not an obvious culprit or problem site, but many of the issues seemed related to them having trouble parsing through many links in many places on the page to find what would be most useful to them.

The two sites where people were most likely to find their content were those where people could find an answer in the main body of the content—without having to scan through the content in side navigation bars. Illinois' "Take Action" section, at the bottom of the content area, was frequently clicked, and three of four users who saw New York's content page with expandable headers specifically mentioned that they liked the layout.

The example above, about the "Your Security Deposit: What It Is and How To Get It Back" article in Michigan's right side bar, is a good example of an element that people seemed not to find.

4. Overall Site Structure and Navigation

Very few people used the internal site search functionality.

Only two of the of 23 users used the internal search functionality, including the 19 users who were asked to look for information starting at the homepage. Both of those two searched when they were asked to start a content search from the homepage. One of the two who searched, however, went straight to that functionality and refined her search several times.

Very few people used the top nav on any site or page

Only seven of 23 users (30%) ever clicked on the top navigation on any site or page. Three of those seven, in fact, clicked on the navigation only the Illinois homepage, where it seems just as likely they would have clicked on a legal term in the content area if one was available to them.

Very few people clicked on the Guide to Legal Help icons/buttons

Of the 43 times that any user saw any homepage, users clicked on the Guide to Legal Help only four times. The Guide is shown as a prominent graphic on the top right of the Michigan homepage content area, and as a button that appears as a prominent part of the top navigation on the Maine site. This is particularly notable as some portion of all users had just been shown a similar "guide" on a different site, and largely had found it helpful when trying to find information. This would imply that many users either did not see the link on the homepage or did not associate the language with the helpful functionality they had seen on another site.

Only a single user expressed interest in creating a letter or form.

Although there were relevant options for creating a letter or form for both of our scenarios on some of the sites (for instance, creating a letter to mail to your landlord to formally request your security deposit back, or to extend the time before eviction), only a single user clicked on a link to create a form. There were also very few users who appeared to be seeking a form on the site.

As forms are one of the most highly used aspects of each of these sites, according to their website analytics, we're unsure what to make of this finding. Some possibilities:

- Perhaps the specific demographics of those we tested were less likely to be interested in creating forms for themselves than those creating them in real life on the other sites. If that's the case, are the demographics more representative or less representative of our actual users?
- Perhaps users in a situation of true need (rather than those playing a role, as ours were) would be more interested in forms.

The layout impacts whether users notice whether is information other than self-help info on the site.

Three users noted that the Michigan site had more types of information (forms, lawyers, self-help centers) than the other sites. It's not clear that that the Michigan site **does** have more types of information, but more users may have seen those options. Two factors that appear to have contributed to this:

- The introductory paragraph on the top of the topic pages on the Michigan site were highly read and contained links to a number of different kinds of options.
- The Maine triage did not have the ability to say whether you wanted to look for a lawyer or not at the beginning, leading several users to believe that it did not include that functionality.

5. Homepage

Having recognizable terms about legal issues (potentially with icons) as the most prominent information displayed in the content area of the homepage was enormously important to user's navigational success.

Three of the four sites featured prominent links to topics --with icons-- in the content area of their homepage. Only one user failed to find relevant content on any of these three sites. However, on the one homepage which required users to find content through a top navigation bar, seven of 11 users did not find the navigation bar and were not able to find content relevant to their question.

Of all 43 times that any user saw any homepage (most users saw two), users clicked on the prominent legal term in the center of the content page 51% of the time. Only 16% clicked on anything in the navigation bar (which was the next most popular thing for them to click).

Users were confused by the "featured" articles on the Illinois homepage.

The Illinois website featured specific articles on the homepage, as opposed to topics. Three of the 12 users who saw this homepage said that didn't think what they were looking for was covered on the site, and that they would leave the site (presumably, they assumed the whole site was devoted to the topics featured in those articles).

Users reacted positively to the photo on the Maine homepage.

Three users said specifically that they liked the photo of the single mom on the Maine homepage; two said that it felt like it represented them. (Although the homepage cycles through multiple pictures, nearly all our users saw this photo specifically, as we opened the sites in advance and the homepage eventually stops rotating and rests on this photo).

6. Triage

All four of the sites we tested had a wizard-like feature, frequently referred to as a "triage" functionality, that allows users to answer a series of questions – for instance, about their county or zip code, topic of interest, and income level—in order to be shown a set of "personalized" resources. These resources are often a combination of different types of help – information, possibilities for legal aid, self-help centers, and forms.

The four different websites differed somewhat in setup and purpose of their triage. For instance, if a user on the Illinois site expressed interest in finding a lawyer at the beginning of the process, they were asked a set of very detailed questions about their income to determine precisely what legal aid services they were eligible for. The New York site had a very minimal triage, including only zip code and topic area. Michigan and Maine were somewhere in between (for instance, they both asked for income, but not in nearly so much detail).

Most users found the guided nature of the triage process very helpful.

> 11 of the 20 people who went through the triage process specifically commented that they liked this way of finding information. For instance, they said they felt the process was easy and step-by-step, and the information felt "personalized" to them. There was no obvious correlation between whether people commented that they liked the triage and their internet proficiency.

Most users were able to go through the triage process to find an answer to their question.

> Of the 35 times 20 participants ran through the triage process (many of them ran through it multiple times), they were successful in finding an answer to their question 69% of the time (24 of 35). In four of the cases in which they weren't successful, they exited the triage process because they were concerned about entering in their demographic data (see next finding). In the other seven cases (which represents five users—two users were unsuccessful on two different sites), the users primarily either had difficulty understanding what the purpose of the triage was or difficulty in navigating through it.

> The order of the questions seemed an important factor in helping users understand the process. Three users commented specifically on the Maine triage that they weren't sure what they going to get at the end of the process (both Michigan and Illinois, in comparison, ask users what resources they'd like to look for at the outset— information, lawyers, or forms). On the other hand, two users mentioned that they specifically liked the Maine triage because they felt it let them explain their legal issue.

25% of those who started a triage process were concerned about providing personal information.

> Of the 20 people who started a triage process, 11 of them were comfortable with providing personal information like their income information. Two expressed some discomfort but continued through the process; three were very uncomfortable providing personal information and said they would leave the site rather than continue. Anecdotally, it felt that a number of the people who were comfortable with the forms simply expected to have to fill out a lot of very personal information to receive services. If this is the case, those that receive many social services—like those we tested, at the offices of social service organization—may be more willing than others to provide information.

Many users valued the ability to see different options for resources side by side.

> Eight of the 20 people who went through the triage process specifically commented that they liked being able to see a number of different options—for instance, both legal aid attorneys and self-help centers, along with information that they could read themselves.

The vast majority of users who saw a pop-up box encouraging them to go through the triage process clicked Yes to proceed.

> 16 people saw a popup encouraging them to go through the triage process (some multiple times), either on the content page or when navigating through topic pages from the homepage. Only three people exited out of that popup. People might have been more prone to click on the popup because we placed them on a page where the popup was already up, but even when they encountered a popup on their own via navigating to content through the homepage, the majority (three of four) clicked through to go to triage. Only one of all 16 gave a negative comment about the popup (that it was annoying).

> It's typical for people in a user testing environment to be agreeable and more likely to do what seems expected – but not to the extent that 81% (13 of 16) would do something they wouldn't ordinarily do. While it may be counter intuitive, this finding indicates that the dislike of popups that exists in many audiences may not be nearly as present in our target audience.

7. Differences by Demographic

A number in our user base—particularly older users-- are not tremendously comfortable in using the internet.

> We gave a general rating to each user on how comfortable they were in general with navigating the websites (i.e. recognizing what was clickable, parsing information). Based on this very informal scoring, the users were exactly split, with seven rated High, seven rated Med, and seven Low (two were not rated). As we tested users on a tablet using a mouse, some may be more comfortable navigating on a phone than in our test method.

> Those who were less comfortable were, not surprisingly, considerably less likely to find the answer they were looking for in our tests. (As the internet comfort level was assessed by the facilitator, however, this could be self-fulfilling—users could have been rated with a lower comfort level **because** they had difficulty finding their answer).

> Older users were less likely to be comfortable using the internet.

There were no obvious differences between users in different test locations.

> We were particularly interested in testing in disparate parts of the state—urban, suburban, rural, and very rural areas –to determine if this made a difference in the usage of the sites. We didn't see any substantial differences. Factors like age and comfort with the internet were much more influential.

> There was not an obvious correlation between test sites and users' internet proficiency. Of the sites where we tested more than four users, Cleveland (an urban area) had the highest number of users rated High, followed by Columbiana (very rural), followed by Chillicothe (rural), followed by Dayton (suburban).

8. Overall Preferences

The vast majority of those tested say that they would use a site like the Illinois, Michigan or Maine one if there was one like it for Ohio.

> Of the 23 users we tested, 20 of them said they would use as site like the ones they looked at if it had information pertaining to Ohio. 13 were able to define specific ways that they would use it. Only one said they wouldn't use it; two said they "probably" would.

What characteristics made people prefer a site?

> After viewing two of the four sites, each user was asked which of the sites seemed "friendliest" to them, and why. Their actual site preferences were not the key point of asking this question—rather, we wanted to understand the

characteristics that stood out to them as "friendly." Navigation through the site was top of mind—five mentioned simply that their favorite was "easier" to navigate, but other common reasons that users liked their "favorite" site:

- Four users: it made it clear where they were going, or broke things down step-by-step or by questions--- in other words, it provided guidance to help the user know what to do next.
- Four: It was simpler, less overwhelming. (On the other hand, two users mentioned that they favored sites because they had **more** information).
- Three: the language was easier to understand – they had "friendlier" or less "scary" words.
- Three: it was easier for them to get answers that were more specifically tailored to their situation.
- Three: there was obvious options for more different types of help (i.e. forms, lawyers, self-help).
- Two: they liked the photos of people on site's homepage.
- Two: it was clear what information was included.

Appendix A: Recruiting and Demographics

The tests were conducted at five different organizations across the state of Ohio. In order to recruit people who were in lower income brackets, the tests were conducted at local community organizations at times during typical working hours when low income residents would be there in person for a specific reason (for instance, to apply for heating assistance, or to get help with taxes. A representative of the location organization presented the opportunity to those waiting to participate in user tests in exchange for a $10 gift card. The specific sites and recruiting techniques were as follows:

- **Chillicothe**: The tests were hosted at the Ross County Community Action Commission, an organization that supports low-and moderate-income county residents with a wide range of social services. We recruited participants on a day when the organization was processing Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) applications, a program that provides utility bill assistance to Ohioans at 175% of poverty or below.   After completing their applications, applicants were asked if they'd be interested in participating in an interview to assist with building a "legal help resource for Ohioans," and those who participated would receive a $10 gift card. Staff also arranged scheduled appointments with two low-to-moderate-income staff members at the organization's Head Start program. Most of these participants lived in rural areas.
- **Cleveland**: The tests were hosted at the Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court Self-Help Center. The Self-Help center provides legal information and forms to self-represented litigants with a matter in domestic relations court.   After the self-represented litigants finished their session with help center staff, the staff member would let them know that we were conducting interviews that would "help improve the services of the self-help center," and those who participated would receive a $10 gift card. Most of these participants lived in urban areas.
- **Columbiana**: The tests were hosted at the Community Action Agency of Columbiana County, in Lisbon, OH, an organization that supports low-and-moderate-income county residents with a wide range of social services. We recruited participants on a day when the organization was processing Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) applications, a program that provides utility bill assistance to Ohioans at 175% of poverty or below. After completing their applications, applicants were asked if they'd be interested in participating in an interview to assist with building a "legal help resource for Ohioans," and those who participated would receive a $10 gift card. Most of these participants lived in very rural areas.
- **Dayton**: The tests were hosted at the Community Action Partnership of Greater Dayton, an organization that supports low-and-moderate-income county residents with a wide range of social services. The staff recruited walk-in applicants for services when they signed in at the waiting room, and also scheduled a number of participants in CAP's on-going "Getting Ahead" Program—a 16-week course aimed at giving participants tools to overcome poverty. Participants were asked if they'd be interested in participating in an interview to assist with building a "legal help resource for Ohioans," and those who participated would receive a $10 gift card. These participants lived in suburban and urban areas.
- **Jackson/Vinton Counties:** The tests were hosted at Jackson-Vinton Community Action, in Wellston, OH, an organization that supports low-and-moderate-income county residents with a wide range of social services. We recruited participants on a day when the organization was processing Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) applications, a program that provides utility bill assistance to Ohioans at 175% of poverty or below. After completing their applications, applicants were asked if they'd be interested in participating in an interview to assist with building a "legal help resource for Ohioans," and those who participated would receive a $10 gift card. Most of these participants lived in very rural areas.

The demographics for the recruited participants were as follows:

- **By gender:** 3 Male; 20 Female. The demographic at the test sites was also skewed more towards women than men, but not as dramatically as our test sample. We estimate that perhaps 60-70% of those seeking services were women. As another contributing factor, men seemed to be accompanied by women more often than they were alone, and most often the people that agreed to take the test were there alone. There's no question that this

skew in testing demographic needs to be considered—it's difficult to know if our results are as applicable for men as they are for women.

- **By location:**
  - 5 in Chillicothe, primarily rural residents
  - 5 in Cleveland, who were primary urban residents
  - 6 Columbiana, primarily very rural residents
  - 5 in Dayton, mix of urban and suburban residents
  - 2 in Jackson/Vinton, primarily very rural residents
- **By race:** 14 White; 9 of color
- **By estimated age:** We did not ask the participants their age, but the facilitator guessed an approximate age based on appearance. Based on these estimates, we approximate:
  - 5 between 20-29 years old
  - 3 were between 30-39
  - 2 were between 40-49
  - 9 between 50-59
  - 2 60 years or more.
  - (We did not capture the estimated age of two participants)
- **By assessed expertise using the internet:** Based on watching the participant use the websites, we assigned each participant a High/Med/Low rating on their apparent comfort level with the internet. These ratings broke down as follows:
  - 7 rated High comfort level
  - 7 rated Medium
  - 7 rated Low
  - (We did not capture the rating for two participants)

We did not specifically ask participants for their income level, but at all but one site (Dayton) we specifically recruited on days where the organizations were assisting Ohioans at 175% of poverty or below. We estimate that well over 50% of our participants were at 175% of poverty or below, and then vast majority were at 300% of poverty or below.

Appendix B: Test Facilitation Guide

Each user test was about 20-30 minutes long. The facilitator introduced themselves and ensured the participant was seated comfortably in front of a Surface tablet, which included a keyboard and mouse. They provided a very brief overview of the project as something "looking to help people in Ohio find legal information and ways to move forward on a lot of their everyday legal problems, centralized into one place." The facilitator then asked each participant a couple of introductory questions:

- Can you say a little about yourself? For instance, where are you from?
- Was there ever a time where you had to figure out what to do about a legal issue? If yes, what was they issue? What was the first thing you did to look for help? What sources of information were helpful? What made them helpful? Did anything make it more difficult than you would have liked to find information?

Each participant was then presented with one of two scenarios and asked to pretend that they were in that situation. The two scenarios were:

Eviction: You're renting an apartment, and things have been hard, and you haven't paid your rent for two months. You come home one day, and this letter has been slipped under your door. You need to—without consulting friends or family—figure out what to do next. (These participants were given a very simple letter from a fictional landlord demanding that they pay immediately or face eviction).

Security Deposit: You were renting an apartment and moved out three months ago. You gave the landlord a security deposit up front. (At this point, we confirmed that the participant knew what a security deposit was). You left the apartment in great shape, but the landlord hasn't returned any of your calls about this, and you're getting the feeling he doesn't intend to. You could really use that money, and you feel like it's time to take the next step to get that money back.

For their situation, each participant was asked:

- What's your instinct as to the first thing you would do? (If a participant provided an answer other than researching online, going to a community organization, or looking for a lawyer, we continued posing hypotheticals—i.e. let's say the friend you want to ask is out of town—until they described one of those three courses of action.)
- Let's say that you specifically wanted to use the internet to help you understand more? Where would you start? Where would you go online?
- If they mentioned an online search engine, we asked what specific terms they would search on.

Each participant was then asked to use one of four state-wide websites: Illinois (www.ilao.org), Maine (www.plta.org), Michigan (michiganlegalhelp.org), or New York (www.lawhelpny.org). These sites were chosen to present a variety of different high quality navigational and content experiences to the users. We rotated through the Maine, Illinois, and Michigan sites to approximately randomize the number of users who saw each and in what order. The New York site was shown to less users (only four), and always as the first site seen.

They were invited to navigate one of the four sites, starting at either the homepage or a pre-picked relevant content page for their topic, whichever seemed more likely to be the result of what they said they would do with the internet to help them learn more.

Let's use some sites! We don't yet have info for Ohio, but we'll pretend this is Ohio. Let's say that your initial search [or whatever they did] got you to this site (and it's actually for Ohio). I'd love for you to go ahead and take the keyboard and mouse, and go ahead and see if you can use this site to figure out what you'd actually like to do about this letter. I'd love for you to do whatever you would do if I weren't here with the site, but talk out loud a little about what you're thinking.

The user was prompted as needed to find information to answer the question implied by what they said they would look for online. After they accomplished this (or they said they'd abandon the site), we asked users to specifically click on the icon for the triage on the site, if they hadn't yet gone through triage.

> I want to ask you one more thing about this site. Can you click on the "Guide to Legal Help" and see if you can use that to get information about what actions you can take?

We then showed them the website for the second state—starting at the homepage or content page as we did for the first site.

> Thanks so much for your help! I'm going to show you a site for a different state, and I'd love for you to do exactly the same thing—to find the information to help you decide what to do next.

And then we asked them to look specifically at the homepage, if they hadn't seen it yet.

> One more, if you're up for it! Let's say that someone you trusted gave you the link to this particular page. What would you click on here to find information to help you figure out what to do about the letter?

We wrapped up by asking them which of the sites seemed most friendly to use, and why, and then whether they thought they would use a site like one of these for Ohio

Number of Times each Site and Scenario was Conducted

Each user saw two sites but only a single scenario. All were approximately randomized to ensure an equal distribution and order, with the exception of the Illinois and New York sites. Because New York had a few things we wanted to test primarily for the security deposit scenario, we substituted the New York site in place of the Illinois site for four tests. The following table summarizes the distribution of the websites and scenarios:

	Eviction	Security Deposit	Total
Illinois	5	7	**12**
Maine	8	8	**16**
Michigan	6	8	**14**
New York	3	1	**4**
Total	**22**	**24**	

Appendix C: Website Screenshots

These screenshots were taken the week after testing. They may not be completely identical to what was tested, but they're very close.

Michigan content page tested for Security Deposit (https://michiganlegalhelp.org/self-help-tools/housing/security-deposit-help-tenants)

MICHIGAN LEGAL HELP
Helping Michigan residents solve their legal problems

English
Español

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Welcome   Self-Help Tools   Organizations & Courts   Guide to Legal Help

For complete results, select the county where you live or where your case is filed:

SELECT COUNTY   →   - COUNTY -

Home » Self-Help Tools » Housing

Eviction for Nonpayment of Rent

Contents

- Demand for Possession
- Starting the Court Case
- Going to Court
- Defending Against Eviction for Non-payment
- Paying Rent after a Judgment

If you rent your home, you must pay rent for it. How much rent and when it is due must be stated in your lease. If you don't have a written lease, your landlord should tell you how much rent you must pay and when it is due.

If you don't pay your rent, your landlord has the right to start the eviction process. Your landlord must go to court to legally evict you. A landlord can't do anything to personally remove you from the property. To learn more about the general eviction process, read Eviction: What Is it and How Does it start?

Eviction is a serious matter. You may want to contact a lawyer. Use Find a Lawyer to find legal help in your area.

Demand for Possession top

Before your landlord can evict you for not paying your rent, your landlord must give you a "Demand for Possession, Nonpayment of Rent." This is the first step in the eviction process. The demand must:

Find a Lawyer

Select a county above for resources near you

Self-Help Centers

Select a county above for resources near you

Community Services

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services - Hearings and Decisions

The Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness

Courts & Agencies

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

Michigan content page tested for Eviction (https://michiganlegalhelp.org/self-help-tools/housing/i-am-being-evicted-non-payment-of-rent-non-subsidized-housing)

Self-Help   Forms   Give   About   Contact   GUIDE TO LEGAL HELP   SELECT LANGUAGE ⌄   DONATE NOW   Q

A Maine Guide To: How to Get Your Security Deposit Back – And What to Do If You Don't

Steps you'll need to take

✓ Introduction
✓ Common Security Deposit Questions
✓ Before You Move In
✓ While You Live There
✓ When You Move Out
✓ What Can I Do if I Don't Get My Security Deposit Back?

Introduction

PRINTABLE GUIDE

EN ESPAÑOL

Feedback

This classroom will walk you through the basics of security deposits in Maine, from what you should do before you move in, to what you can do if you don't get your deposit back when you move out. It explains what security deposits are, and steps you can take to make sure you get your deposit back when you move out.

Is this classroom for you?

You may use this classroom if:

- You are renting
- You plan on renting in the future
- You have moved out, and want to know how to get your security deposit back

If you have other questions about rental housing, you should visit our guide to Rights of Tenants in Maine.

How this classroom works:

We've created this classroom so you can walk through a process step-by-step and keep track of your progress. The general topics are numbered on the left side of your screen.

- Click on the name of the step you want to visit OR use the "next" and "previous" buttons at the bottom of each page to go between sections of the classroom.

Maine content page tested for Security Deposit (https://ptla.org/classroom/how-to-get-your-security-deposit-back-maine)

Rights of Maine Renters: Eviction

EN ESPAÑOL   PRINTABLE GUIDE

Introduction

This article answers some common questions renters in Maine have about their rights. Each state has different laws protecting renters - this article only covers the law in the state of Maine. If you live outside of Maine and are looking for help or information, try the LSC Legal Aid Finder or search for rights or tenants of renters in your state.

Can my landlord turn off my utilities or change the locks on my door or kick me out without going to court?

No. It is illegal for your landlord to throw you out by force. Your landlord must get a court order before they evict you.

If your landlord tries to get around this by changing the locks, taking your property, or shutting off any of your utilities, they have broken the law. If you take them to court and ask for immediate help, the court may stop the landlord and order them to pay you for your losses or $250.00, whichever is greater, plus your court costs. If you have a lawyer and you win the case, the court can also order your landlord to pay your attorney fees.

NOTE: The electric company must determine if tenants are living in a place before cutting off service at the owner's request. If you agree to put the service in your name and you pay the bills going forward, the electric company cannot cut you off. This applies to all utility companies that are regulated by the Maine PUC (including water, telephone land line, and natural gas companies).

Maine content page tested for Eviction (https://ptla.org/rights-maine-renters-eviction)

House & Apartment

For local legal information, enter your zip code

GETTING OR GIVING BACK A SECURITY DEPOSIT

Rate ★★★★☆
Average: 3.3 (8 votes)

A security deposit is a payment held by a landlord to make sure that the tenant pays rent on time and keeps the apartment or house in good condition. The tenant pays the landlord the money, and the landlord keeps it until after the tenant moves out.

The lease should explain the purpose of the security or damage deposit, and say what it can be used for. If there is no lease, or the lease does not explain what a deposit can be used for, the landlord can use the deposit for the following things:

- Unpaid rent
- Cleaning the apartment
- Repairing damages

Damages or other expenses that were caused by normal wear and tear cannot be taken out of the deposit.

How much can a security deposit be?

Generally, there are no limits on how much a landlord can charge as a security dep[...]
Landlords usually charge one or two months' rent. But, there are some exceptions:

- Subsidized or public housing: Landlords may only charge a deposit similar to deposits being charged by private landlords in the area.
- Mobile home parks: Landlords cannot charge more than one month's rent in a mobile home park in which the landlord rents 5 or more trailers.

Is it OK for a tenant to not pay their last month's rent since the landlord has a security deposit?

No. A security deposit does not take the place of rent, even though landlords will keep the

☐ FORMS

Security deposit demand letter in Chicago (Easy Form)

A program to help you demand that your former landlord return your security deposit. Only for Chicago.

Security deposit demand - buildings with 4 or fewer units (Easy Form)

A program to help you demand that your former landlord return your security deposit. Not for Chicago.

Security deposit complaint in Chicago (Easy Form)

A program to help you sue to get your security deposit back. Only for Chicago.

⊘ Apply

Feedback

Illinois content page tested for Security Deposit (https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/legal-information/getting-security-deposit-back)

Home / Legal Information / House & Apartment / My landlord is trying to evict me

House & Apartment

For local legal information, enter your zip code

📄 FORMS

Extend time of eviction (Easy Form)

A program to help you complete the forms to ask for more time in your rental unit before being evicted.

Seal record of eviction - landlord in foreclosure (Easy Form)

A program to help you ask the court to seal the record of your eviction due to your landlord bring in foreclosure.

End illegal lock out demand (Easy Form)

A program to help you demand that your landlord give you back your home and ask the police to help you.

MY LANDLORD IS TRYING TO EVICT ME

🖨 🐦 f G+ in ✉ SMS

Rate ★★★☆☆
Average: 2.4 (5 votes)

A landlord can evict a tenant if the tenant:

- Fails to pay the rent when it is due;
- Violates any of the terms and conditions of the lease agreement;
- Damages the property;
- Does not leave the property after the lease comes to an end; or
- Does not have a written lease, but pays rent monthly, and the landlord gives a 30-day notice to move.

A landlord cannot evict a tenant for:

✓ Apply

- Complaining about the unit or building that a building inspector determines is valid;
- Not paying rent, if the tenant left the property for a period of time because of domestic violence or the threat of domestic violence; or
- Race, color, ethnicity, sex, disability, religion, discharge from the military, military status, age, marital status, sexual orientation, or rent assistance (like Section 8

💬 Feedback

Also, a landlord cannot evict a tenant if the tenant pays the rent that's due and the landlord accepts it.

LEARN MORE

Eviction defenses

Written eviction notices

Eviction settlement for tenants

How your landlord can give you an eviction notice

TAKE ACTION

Responding to an eviction case

Illinois content page tested for Eviction (https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/legal-information/my-landlord-trying-evict-me)

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Learn the basics   +

You can't be locked out   +

Tenants serving in the military   +

When the marshal comes to evict you   +

Eviction for not paying rent   +

Eviction cases that are not about rent   +

Preparing for housing court   +

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New York content page tested for Eviction (https://www.lawhelpny.org/issues/housing/eviction)

Illinois' initial triage screen

One of a number of screens from Maine's triage

Michigan's initial triage screen, partially complete

An example of a triage popup window (this is from Maine, but others are similar)

Illinois homepage https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/

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Welcome to Michigan Legal Help

Michigan Legal Help is for people who are handling their legal problems without a lawyer. It can help you learn about your legal problems and get ready for court. There are many Do-It-Yourself tools to help you create court forms. This website does not give legal advice, and it is not a substitute for having a lawyer. If you need more help, search the website for a lawyer, community services,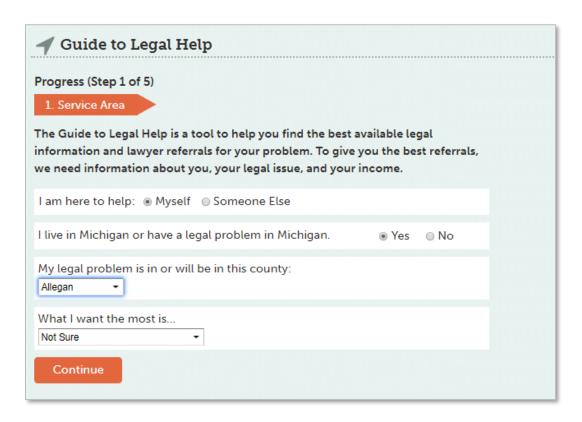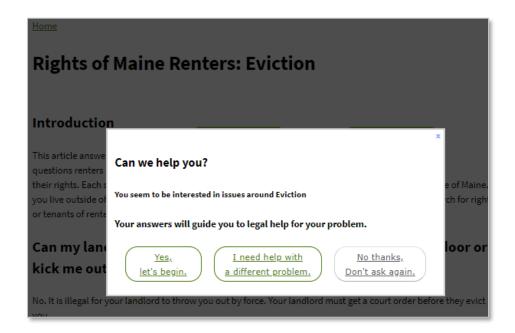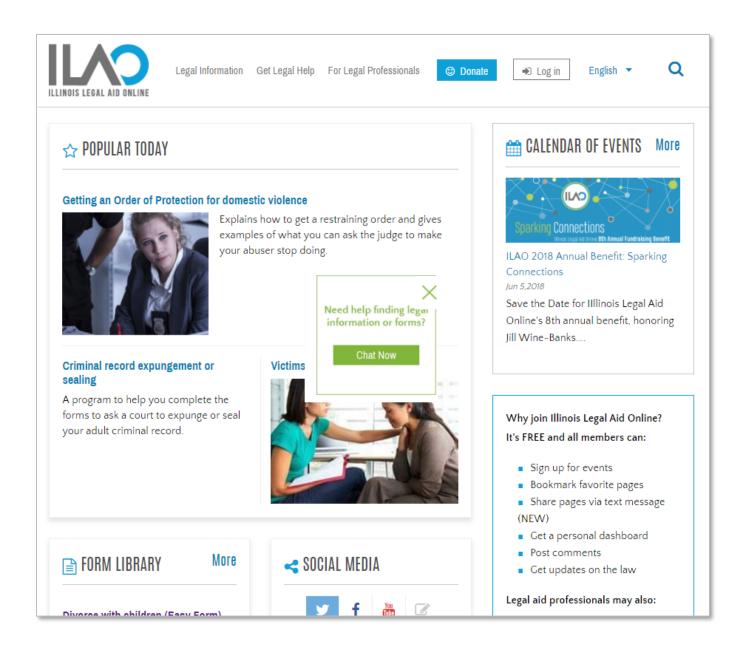 or a Self-Help Center nearby. The website does not cover all areas of law, but we add new topics all the time. Please tell us what you think and let us know if we helped and how we can improve this site. To learn more, try our new Guide to Legal Help or watch our User's Guide video.

➤ **Guide to Legal Help**

Self Help Tools

Family
Divorce, Custody, Parenting Time, Child Support, Paternity, Guardianship, Name Change, and Emancipation.

Personal Safety
Domestic Violence, Stalking, Personal Protection Orders (PPO).

Housing
Leases, Landlord/Tenant matters, Mobile Homes, Eviction, Security Deposits, Subsidized Housing.

Money and Debt

Organizations and Courts

Find a Lawyer
Find a lawyer in your area to help you with your legal matter.

Self-Help Centers
Find a Self Help Center near you to get additional help representing yourself in court.

Community Services
Find a local community service organization for other assistance.

Courts & Agencies
Contact information and what you need to know

Michigan homepage (https://michiganlegalhelp.org/)

Maine homepage https://ptla.org/

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