

Mayor's Office of Consumer Affairs

The Mayor's Office of Consumer Affairs (MOCAL) consumer mediation program began in July of 1997. MOCAL works in conjunction with the Massachusetts' Office of the Attorney General to resolve consumer cases.

MOCAL provides assistance to Boston consumers by providing information regarding consumer rights and methods of dealing with businesses, advocating for better consumer protection regulations and laws, and mediating disputes between consumers and business entities.

Follow us on Twitter

[@ConsumerBoston](https://twitter.com/ConsumerBoston)

Call (617)635-3834 or email

MOCAL@boston.gov for consumer assistance or for copies of helpful consumer brochures.

Visit us at Boston City Hall (Room 817

Monday through Friday

9:00 a. m. – 5:00 p.m.



Mayor's Office of Consumer Affairs & Licensing
Boston City Hall
1 City Hall Square, Room 809
Boston, MA 02201



CITY of BOSTON
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

TIPS ON AVOIDING RENTAL SCAMS IN BOSTON



MICHELLE WU
MAYOR

November 2021

SEARCHING FOR AN APARTMENT / OFF CAMPUS HOUSING

Source	Pros	Cons
3rd Party Websites (Craigslist)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No fee Easy access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scam prone
Real Estate Broker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to unlisted apartments Knowledge of city and neighborhoods Can help you negotiate lease and rent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broker Fees Finder's Fees
College Off-Campus Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Licensed and verified Relationship with licensed realtors Can help find roommates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not all listings are updated in real time Fees
Rental apps or websites (Ex. Zillow, HotPads)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediate access to listings Real-time availability Photos Reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fees Some scams
Paper Classified Ads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct connection to property owner or manager No fees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time consuming No Fee Only access to one property

TIPS ON AVOIDING RENTAL SCAMS ON THIRD PARTY WEBSITES

In recent years, the number of rental scams have sharply increased. Many renters will use third party websites since they are easy to access and there are no fees compared to the alternative rental housing resources. Renters put themselves at a higher risk when using these websites as *anyone* can post a rental listing and it will not be verified. **The best course of action against a rental scam is prevention!**

Here are some tips on avoiding rental scams if you do decide to use a third party website:

- Does the posting have grammatical or spelling errors?

Listings with too many grammatical errors or spelling mistakes are not necessarily fake but should be proceeded with caution.

- Does the rental rate make sense for the location?

Fake listings will often offer much lower rates than other listings in the area to attract victims. You can check the fair market rental rates for specific zip codes on www.huduser.gov.

- Does the posting seem too good to be true?
- Have you spoken to the listing contact person on the phone?
- Do they ask for all your personal or financial information?

- Have you seen the apartment in person?

You should never sign a lease or submit a deposit without seeing the property first. Most scammers do not have access to the property but scammers are becoming more clever. They will get access to properties that have been foreclosed on or have recently deceased owners..

If you do see the property, you should request to see their credentials, such as a realtor's license or identification. You should also make note of the make and model of their car and the license plate number.

You can verify the property owner on the Suffolk County's Registry of Deeds or the City of Boston's Assessing website. You can also call the Inspectional Services Department as rental units are required to be registered with the City.

- There is no screening process such as a background or credit check.

Scammers will target people with bad credit or with a criminal history who may have a harder time securing an apartment.

- Do they ask you to send money through Moneygram, Western Union, Paypal or Venmo?

Money sent through these transfer companies cannot be recovered and is equivalent to giving the person cash. Paypal does not protect users for real estate transactions.

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU GET SCAMMED?

Report it immediately!

- Police Department
- Federal Trade Commission (FTC)
- FBI Internet Crime Center (ic3)
- Attorney General's Office