

RCW 59.18.150 Landlord's right of entry—Purposes—Searches by fire officials—Searches by code enforcement officials for inspection purposes—Conditions.

(1) The tenant shall not unreasonably withhold consent to the landlord to enter into the dwelling unit in order to inspect the premises, make necessary or agreed repairs, alterations, or improvements, supply necessary or agreed services, or exhibit the dwelling unit to prospective or actual purchasers, mortgagees, tenants, workers, or contractors.

(2) Upon written notice of intent to seek a search warrant, when a tenant or landlord denies a fire official the right to search a dwelling unit, a fire official may immediately seek a search warrant and, upon a showing of probable cause specific to the dwelling unit sought to be searched that criminal fire code violations exist in the dwelling unit, a court of competent jurisdiction shall issue a warrant allowing a search of the dwelling unit.

Upon written notice of intent to seek a search warrant, when a landlord denies a fire official the right to search the common areas of the rental building other than the dwelling unit, a fire official may immediately seek a search warrant and, upon a showing of probable cause specific to the common area sought to be searched that a criminal fire code violation exists in those areas, a court of competent jurisdiction shall issue a warrant allowing a search of the common areas in which the violation is alleged.

The superior court and courts of limited jurisdiction organized under Titles 3, 35, and 35A RCW have jurisdiction to issue such search warrants. Evidence obtained pursuant to any such search may be used in a civil or administrative enforcement action.

(3) As used in this section:

(a) "Common areas" means a common area or those areas that contain electrical, plumbing, and mechanical equipment and facilities used for the operation of the rental building.

(b) "Fire official" means any fire official authorized to enforce the state or local fire code.

(4) (a) A search warrant may be issued by a judge of a superior court or a court of limited jurisdiction under Titles 3, 35, and 35A RCW to a code enforcement official of the state or of any county, city, or other political subdivision for the purpose of allowing the inspection of any specified dwelling unit and premises to determine the presence of an unsafe building condition or a violation of any building regulation, statute, or ordinance.

(b) A search warrant must only be issued upon application of a designated officer or employee of a county or city prosecuting or regulatory authority supported by an affidavit or declaration made under oath or upon sworn testimony before the judge, establishing probable cause that a violation of a state or local law, regulation, or ordinance regarding rental housing exists and endangers the health or safety of the tenant or adjoining neighbors. In addition, the affidavit must contain a statement that consent to inspect has been sought from the owner and the tenant but could not be obtained because the owner or the tenant either refused or failed to respond within five days, or a statement setting forth facts or circumstances reasonably justifying the failure to seek such consent. A landlord may not take or threaten to take reprisals or retaliatory action as defined in RCW 59.18.240 against a tenant who gives consent to a code enforcement official of the state or of any county, city, or other political subdivision to inspect his or her dwelling unit to determine

the presence of an unsafe building condition or a violation of any building regulation, statute, or ordinance.

(c) In determining probable cause, the judge is not limited to evidence of specific knowledge, but may also consider any of the following:

(i) The age and general condition of the premises;

(ii) Previous violations or hazards found present in the premises;

(iii) The type of premises;

(iv) The purposes for which the premises are used; or

(v) The presence of hazards or violations in and the general condition of premises near the premises sought to be inspected.

(d) Before issuing an inspection warrant, the judge shall find that the applicant has: (i) Provided written notice of the date, approximate time, and court in which the applicant will be seeking the warrant to the owner and, if the applicant reasonably believes the dwelling unit or rental property to be inspected is in the lawful possession of a tenant, to the tenant; and (ii) posted a copy of the notice on the exterior of the dwelling unit or rental property to be inspected. The judge shall also allow the owner and any tenant who appears during consideration of the application for the warrant to defend against or in support of the issuance of the warrant.

(e) All warrants must include at least the following:

(i) The name of the agency and building official requesting the warrant and authorized to conduct an inspection pursuant to the warrant;

(ii) A reasonable description of the premises and items to be inspected; and

(iii) A brief description of the purposes of the inspection.

(f) An inspection warrant is effective for the time specified in the warrant, but not for a period of more than ten days unless it is extended or renewed by the judge who signed and issued the original warrant upon satisfying himself or herself that the extension or renewal is in the public interest. The inspection warrant must be executed and returned to the judge by whom it was issued within the time specified in the warrant or within the extended or renewed time. After the expiration of the time specified in the warrant, the warrant, unless executed, is void.

(g) An inspection pursuant to a warrant must not be made:

(i) Between 7:00 p.m. of any day and 8:00 a.m. of the succeeding day, on Saturday or Sunday, or on any legal holiday, unless the owner or, if occupied, the tenant specifies a preference for inspection during such hours or on such a day;

(ii) Without the presence of an owner or occupant over the age of eighteen years or a person designated by the owner or occupant unless specifically authorized by a judge upon a showing that the authority is reasonably necessary to effectuate the purpose of the search warrant; or

(iii) By means of forcible entry, except that a judge may expressly authorize a forcible entry when:

(A) Facts are shown that are sufficient to create a reasonable suspicion of a violation of a state or local law or rule relating to municipal or county building, fire, safety, environmental, animal control, land use, plumbing, electrical, health, minimum housing, or zoning standards that, if the violation existed, would be an immediate threat to the health or safety of the tenant; or

(B) Facts are shown establishing that reasonable attempts to serve a previous warrant have been unsuccessful.

(h) Immediate execution of a warrant is prohibited, except when necessary to prevent loss of life or property.

(i) Any person who willfully refuses to permit inspection, obstructs inspection, or aids in the obstruction of an inspection of property authorized by warrant issued pursuant to this section is subject to remedial and punitive sanctions for contempt of court under chapter 7.21 RCW. Such conduct may also be subject to a civil penalty imposed by local ordinance that takes into consideration the facts and circumstances and the severity of the violation.

(5) The landlord may enter the dwelling unit without consent of the tenant in case of emergency or abandonment.

(6) The landlord shall not abuse the right of access or use it to harass the tenant, and shall provide notice before entry as provided in this subsection. Except in the case of emergency or if it is impracticable to do so, the landlord shall give the tenant at least two days' written notice of his or her intent to enter and shall enter only at reasonable times. The notice must state the exact time and date or dates of entry or specify a period of time during that date or dates in which the entry will occur, in which case the notice must specify the earliest and latest possible times of entry. The notice must also specify the telephone number to which the tenant may communicate any objection or request to reschedule the entry. The tenant shall not unreasonably withhold consent to the landlord to enter the dwelling unit at a specified time where the landlord has given at least one day's notice of intent to enter to exhibit the dwelling unit to prospective or actual purchasers or tenants. A landlord shall not unreasonably interfere with a tenant's enjoyment of the rented dwelling unit by excessively exhibiting the dwelling unit.

(7) The landlord has no other right of access except by court order, arbitrator or by consent of the tenant.

(8) A landlord or tenant who continues to violate the rights of the tenant or landlord with respect to the duties imposed on the other as set forth in this section after being served with one written notification alleging in good faith violations of this section listing the date and time of the violation shall be liable for up to one hundred dollars for each violation after receipt of the notice. The prevailing landlord or tenant may recover costs of the suit or arbitration under this section, and may also recover reasonable attorneys' fees.

(9) Nothing in this section is intended to (a) abrogate or modify in any way any common law right or privilege or (b) affect the common law as it relates to a local municipality's right of entry under emergency or exigent circumstances. [2011 c 132 § 9; 2010 c 148 § 3; 2002 c 263 § 1. Prior: 1989 c 342 § 7; 1989 c 12 § 18; 1973 1st ex.s. c 207 § 15.]