Virginia Housing Commission

Ancillary Fees in Residential Rental Agreements: Study of Virginia Property Management Practices & Analysis of State Policy Trends

OCTOBER 2025

VIRGINIA HOUSING COMMISSION

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Study of Ancillary Fees in Virginia Property Management Companies

Summary

This report presents an analysis of fees and policies from approximately 100 property management companies operating in Virginia, including the Northern Virginia, Richmond, Charlottesville, and Hampton Roads markets. Analysis of the data indicates a complex rental landscape where tenants' monthly financial obligation commonly goes beyond the advertised monthly rent. Key findings show that while application fees are relatively standard ($50-$75), tenants commonly face significant variable fees, such as lease administration fees ($0-$600).

A notable trend in Virginia is the implementation of mandatory or auto-enrolled Resident Benefits Packages (RBPs). These packages, which typically add an average of $30 to $60 per month to a tenant's costs, often bundle services like renters' insurance, HVAC filter delivery, and credit reporting. Tenants frequently have limited or no ability to opt out of these packages and their associated costs.

A variety of other costs, such as monthly administrative fees, move-in/move-out fees, and utility packages, are common. These findings suggest that the true cost of renting is often higher than advertised and that prospective tenants may face a research burden to understand their full financial obligations.

Scope and Methodology

Information was collected and analyzed from approximately 100 property management companies across various regions of Virginia, including Northern Virginia, Richmond, Charlottesville, Hampton Roads, and Fredericksburg.

Data collection methodology:

1. Reviewing individual company websites.
2. Analyzing property listings on third-party rental platforms (e.g., Zillow, Apartment List).
3. Direct communication with company representatives.

The data collection focused on any mandatory fees charged to prospective and current tenants, distinct from the advertised monthly rent.

Findings

The study revealed several categories of fees charged to tenants in addition to base rent. These fees include both upfront costs and recurring costs.

Upfront Costs

Application Fees

While the Code of Virginia sets a cap of $50 for application fees, exclusive of out-of-pocket expenses, the market data shows that many landlords charge more than this amount. An analysis of 112 listed application fees found that while the most common fee is $50, (43.75%) the average application fee is $56.47.

Table 1: Application Fee Ranges in Virginia

Application Fee Range	Percentage of Total (N=112)
$1 - $49	11.61%
$50	43.75%
$51 - $75	41.07%
Over $75	3.57%

Lease Administration Fees

This one-time, non-refundable fee charged at lease signing represents a significant and highly variable upfront cost for tenants. Observed lease administration fees ranged from $0 to $600.[1] The data shows that 61.8% of lease administration fees fall between $150 and $250.

[1] This data is based on the 55 companies that publicly provide their lease administration fee information.

Out of 55 companies that publicly provided their lease administration fee, the most common fee observed was $200 (charged by nine companies). This is followed by fees of $250 (charged by eight companies) and $150 (charged by seven companies). Overall, the average lease administration fee is $209 and the median fee is $200. However, it is important to note that several companies charge above the average or median fees, with charges of $395, $500, and $600 observed. This fee is often described as a charge for processing paperwork, drafting the lease, and setting up the tenant's account.

Recurring Monthly Costs

The Resident Benefits Package (RBP)

A Resident Benefits Package (RBP) is a bundle of services that a property management company or landlord provides to tenants for an additional monthly fee on top of the regular rent. This is a growing trend in the rental industry, with RBPs becoming a way for landlords to differentiate their properties and generate additional revenue.

Over 95% of the companies examined auto-enroll residents in RBPs. Only two of the companies that auto-enroll residents in RBPs (4.7%) allow tenants to opt out completely[2]. Based on the sample, the average cost of a resident benefit package is $40.92 per month in Virginia. Packages commonly bundle services such as renters/liability insurance, HVAC air filter delivery, credit building, identity protection, and move-in concierge services. While some RBPs offer tenants the ability to opt out of the landlord provided insurance if they provide their own policy for a small fee reduction, some of the mandatory RBPs do not include insurance and the tenant is required to purchase an individual policy.

Utilities

Based on the results of this study, tenants in Virginia are typically responsible for nearly all utilities, including water, sewer, electricity, gas, and trash.

Other Fees and Policies

A wide array of additional charges were observed, further increasing the total cost of tenancy. Some companies charge a monthly "admin fee" ($10-$20) separate from the RBP. Additionally, one-time fees such as "Amenity Fees" ($100), "Move-In Fees" ($225), and "Move-Out Inspection Fees" ($85) are common in residential leases. One company studied imposes a $500 cleaning fee at the beginning of the lease. Some leases require fees for tasks that may be considered part of the landlord’s duty to maintain a habitable premises, such as a $55 fee for toilet unclogging or fees for post-tenancy painting. Several companies require prospective tenants to pay the full, non-refundable application fee before they are permitted to tour a property.

The study indicates that prior to signing a lease, the true cost of rental housing in Virginia is often obscured. Prospective tenants may face a research burden to understand their full financial obligations. The remainder of this document provides a comprehensive policy review on the regulation of ancillary fees in Virginia and other states.

[2] This data is based on 43 property management companies that publish their RBPs online or disclosed information when contacted privately.

Policy Review: Regulating Ancillary Fees in Rental Agreements

Introduction

As housing affordability challenges persist nationwide, there have been increased efforts to regulate mandatory fees for non-essential services (often termed "junk fees") as a non-optional condition of tenancy. This report outlines policies concerning these non-optional fees and examines statewide regulatory efforts designed to limit the application of these fees and enhance transparency in the rental market. Various models have emerged to address the burden of non-essential fees on tenants. Recurring policy discussions at the state level typically focus on mandatory fee disclosures, regulation of application fees and processes, and attempts to prohibit certain fees that are deemed non-essential.

Key Takeaways

- Virginia is among the first states to enact legislation aimed at regulating ancillary fees in the residential rental market and is often cited in research as a leader in this policy space. While Virginia is a leader in this trend, many other states have introduced and passed laws that place stricter regulations on fees in residential leases.
- Following Virginia, there has been an increase in laws enacted to promote fee transparency in rental agreements.
    - Virginia's recent fee disclosure law has been widely praised for promoting transparency in the rental market. However, most other states that have passed some form of fee disclosure related to residential rental prices have also required the disclosure of fees prior to collecting any sort of application fee (Colorado, Connecticut, New Mexico, Maine, Minnesota). Disclosing all fees in a rental listing, or prior to collecting fees, may help tenants fully understand their financial obligations before they invest time and money in an application.
- While there has been an increase in introduced legislation aimed at regulating application fees, 32 states have not placed statutory limits on the cost of application fees.
    - Virginia places a $50 cap on application fees but specifies that amount is exclusive of any actual out-of-pocket expenses paid to a third party for screening services. This allows a landlord to collect an amount over $50.
        - California's variable cost cap allows the cap to adjust to market considerations and provides flexibility for landlords to cover their actual costs while still mandating a set cap.
    - The Study of Ancillary Fees in Virginia's Property Management Companies found that while the most common listed fee is $50 (43.75% of listed application fees) the average application fee is $56.47.
- At least seven states have enacted laws that allow for tenants to provide reusable (or portable) application screening reports. The adoption of these reports is a method of controlling escalating costs in competitive markets where tenants are often forced to pay associated application fees for multiple properties concurrently.
    - Three out of the seven states do not require landlords to accept the reports.
    - A bill proposed in Virginia in 2022 would have allowed tenants to provide reusable tenants screening reports in lieu of an application screening fee. The bill did not pass (HB 804, 2022).
- Other states have not been successful when trying to challenge the mandatory nature of various fees imposed by landlords.
    - In most states, there are no specific laws preventing a landlord from billing services to tenants or allowing a tenant to opt out of those services. Recently introduced legislation requiring landlords to allow tenants to opt-out of billed services has not been successful. Opposition to this legislation is frequently based on concerns regarding bulk billing arrangements, the complexity of service requirements, and additional financial considerations.
    - Beyond granting opt-out rights, the Colorado model limits the potential profit a landlord can derive from mandated fees. Colorado's model allows landlords to mandate a service while preventing the use of third-party services as a significant profit generator.
- Virginia's security deposit cap is higher than caps imposed in some other states. However, around half of all states have no legal limit on the amount a landlord can require for a security deposit.
- In Virginia, landlords have 45 days to return the security deposit to a tenant moving out of a unit, assuming no damage has occurred. This deadline is longer than the typical 30-day return policy implemented by most other states that regulate security deposits. Additionally, some states have imposed a 14-day limit to allow for rapid turnover and prevent delays to a tenant's ability to move, as tenants often need to secure funds for a new deposit (New York, Nebraska, South Dakota). A shorter window to return a deposit may improve a tenant's ability to move without excessive financial burdens. Conversely, Alabama, Arkansas, and West Virginia allow up to 60 days for a landlord to return a security deposit to a tenant.

Increasing Rental Price Transparency

Laws that promote transparency in pricing have been widely pushed in several states. Many states, including Virginia, have enacted laws related to transparent pricing in residential leases. While many states have some form of disclosure requirement, the specific laws and what they require can vary. These laws are designed to provide renters clear and complete information about the costs associated with a rental agreement.

Summary of Findings

Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, Rhode Island, and Virginia have passed laws requiring landlords to provide a written disclosure of all costs. Unlike Virginia, most states that have passed policies that promote rental price transparency require the disclosure of all non-optional fees *prior* to accepting any sort of application fee. In Virginia and Rhode Island, the disclosure of fees typically happens during the lease signing process.

Code of Virginia

Virginia law requires the first page of the written rental agreement to include an itemization of all charges to the tenant that includes:

- The security deposit,
- The amount of rent due per payment period, and
- Any additional one-time charges due prior to the commencement of the date of the rental agreement or that will be included in the first rental agreement.

This itemization of all charges must provide a description of any rent and fees to be charged in addition to the periodic rent. No fee can be collected from the tenant unless it is described within that list. In Virginia, ""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" (VA § 55.1-1204.1).

> **§ 55.1-1204.1. Fee disclosure statement.**
>
> A landlord shall provide, beginning on the first page of the written rental agreement, a description of any rent and fees to be charged to the tenant in addition to the periodic rent. Immediately above the list of fees, the written rental agreement shall state: No fee shall be collected unless it is listed below or incorporated into this agreement by way of a separate addendum after execution of this rental agreement.

Enacted Legislation

California

California's 2024 "Honest Pricing Law," made it illegal for businesses to advertise or list a price for a good or service that does not include all required fees or charges (SB 478, 2024). While this law was introduced primarily to target California's restaurant and retail industry, it also applies to housing providers. Landlords cannot publish a listing without disclosing all upfront fees.

Colorado

Colorado law, effective January 1, 2026, prohibits landlords from advertising only a lower base rent. Any advertisements must clearly show the combined total of rent plus any mandatory fees (House Bill 25-1090). The bill was passed as a part of a broader effort to eliminate deceptive consumer pricing practices across various Colorado markets, including the residential rental market.

Fees that can no longer be separately charged to the tenant include:

- Fees for the maintenance of common areas,
- Fees related to property taxes,
- Processing fees on rental payments,
- A late fee or charge for any amount owed that is not rent (ex. late fee on separately billed utilities),
- Any fee to cover a landlord's cost incurred in the performance of its statutory obligations (ex. costs to ensure the unit is habitable),
- Any fee in excess of the landlord's actual costs, except when explicitly permitted,
- Any fee that increases by more than two percent over the course of a year (except utilities not in the landlord's control), and
- A fee for a benefit or service that is not actually provided to tenants (ex. pool fee during months when the pool is closed).

Utility fees and optional fees (such as pet fees, parking, trash) can still be billed separately to tenants or omitted from the total rent disclosure.

Additionally, landlords are prohibited from charging tenants the cost of utilities that are above the amount charged by the utility provider for the services to the tenant's unit that increases by more than two percent over one year. Additional information on Colorado's rental fee regulations can be found in the remainder of this document.

Connecticut

Connecticut requires businesses to advertise the total price, including any fees, charges, or costs, that are required to purchase or lease a good or service. Additionally, the law prohibits businesses from requiring a consumer to pay a fee unless the fee is disclosed. Fees that "cannot be feasibly" calculated in full when the price is first advertised are exempt from initial disclosure, so long as the existence of such fee is disclosed and the amount is disclosed prior to purchase.

Massachusetts

In 2025 the Massachusetts Attorney General introduced new regulations related to ancillary fees under the Massachusetts Consumer Protection Law (940 CMR 38.00: Unfair and Deceptive Fees, 2025). The regulations require businesses that advertise in Massachusetts to clearly and conspicuously present the total price of the good or service advertised for sale, including rental units. A landlord may advertise the total price as the monthly rent if the full period of the lease agreement is also disclosed. Additionally, when the total price is presented, mandatory and optional fees must also be disclosed. If the fees are optional, the seller must disclose "readily available" instructions on how to avoid such fees. Finally, the seller must disclose the total price of any good or service prior to requiring a consumer to provide any personal information, including billing information.

New Mexico

In any published listing for a dwelling unit, landlords in New Mexico must disclose all costs, including base rent and an itemized description of all fees that will be charged during tenancy. The law includes a provision protecting landlords from being held liable for a third-party website's failure to accurately display all associated rental costs, as long as the landlord provided accurate information (SB 267, 2025).

Charging undisclosed fees is now considered an unfair trade practice under New Mexico law, which can lead to additional legal consequences for landlords.

Rhode Island

Rhode Island law requires landlords to disclose all non-rent fees in the same section of the lease as the rent disclosure. If no written lease exists, landlords must provide a written list of all fees, utility responsibilities, and any renter's insurance requirements (RI Gen. Laws § 34-18-15, 2024). If a landlord fails to comply, the tenant may recover any undisclosed fees they have paid. The act also prohibits convenience fees for rent payments unless at least one free payment method is offered (RI Gen. Laws § 34-18-61, 2024).

Utah

Prior to accepting an application fee, landlords who own residential buildings with more than four units are required to provide prospective tenants with a written good faith estimate of the rent amount and any cost contained in the rental agreement.

The landlord must also disclose:

- the day on which the residential rental unit is scheduled to be available;
- the criteria that the owner will consider in determining the prospective renter's eligibility as a renter in the residential rental unit, including criteria related to the prospective renter's criminal history, credit, income, employment, or rental history; and
- the requirements and process for the prospective renter to recover money the prospective renter pays in relation to the residential rental unit.

Proposed Legislation

California

A bill was introduced in 2025 to prohibit most rental housing fees but was amended to focus on transparency. The bill would create more transparent rental unit pricing by requiring that common charges passed to tenants be included in any advertised rent (AB-1248, 2025). This bill would prohibit a landlord or landlord's agent from using a ratio utility billing system to allocate, demand, or collect fees or charges from a tenant, except for fees or charges for water or sewer service, as provided.

The bill would also prohibit the landlord from charging the tenant for anything other than required fees and charges, and fees for optional housing services.

> Optional housing services means a service including, but not limited to, a parking space, event space, storage space, use of laundry machine, or similar, that meets all of the following criteria:
>
> - Not required to be provided by a residential landlord to a tenant by local, state, or other applicable law.

- Not a condition of the tenancy, required by the landlord or landlord's agent as subject to a required fee or charge, or offered as one of two or more options when selecting at least one of the options is required.
- Freely selectable or rejectable by the tenant on an opt-in basis, with no adverse action or impact to the tenant.
- Cancelable by the tenant with no more than 30 days' notice to the landlord, with no adverse action or impact to the tenant.
- Reasonably available to the tenant from a source other than the landlord or landlord's agent.
- Not within or physically connected to the tenant's dwelling unit.
- Not unilaterally cancelable by the landlord, unless the tenant has failed to pay the fee for 30 days past the due date or the landlord is no longer offering the service to all tenants.

The bill includes a provision that would make a landlord liable to a tenant in a civil action for actual damages, injunctive and declaratory relief, reasonable attorney's fees and costs. The bill is pending until 2026 as collaboration among stakeholders continues (Nemeth, 2025).

Georgia

A bill was introduced in 2025 to amend the "Fair Business Practices Act of 1975" to create more transparency with respect to rent pricing for residential properties. The bill would make it illegal for a landlord to advertise any residential rental property without disclosing the total price, including mandatory fees for ancillary services (S 251, 2025).

Illinois

Illinois introduced the "Rental Fee Transparency and Fairness Act" (HB 3564, 2025) during the 2025 General Assembly session. While the original draft focused on banning most fees, the more recent rewrite focuses on the disclosure of fees in the lease agreement. The bill is pending. A similar bill was introduced in 2024 and failed (HB 4796, 2024).

Failed Legislation

Arizona

A proposed bill would have required landlords to disclose all additional fees in any advertisement that provides a rental rate. The bill would also have allowed tenants to opt out of nonessential services (HB 2268, 2024). The bill died.

Nevada

The Nevada legislature passed a bill that would require landlords to disclose in an appendix "a clear and concise explanation of each fee" that may be charged during the tenancy. Landlords would be prohibited from charging fees that are not listed in the appendix. The appendix must also include whether each fee is a fixed fee or a variable fee, like a late fee. The bill was vetoed by the governor (AB280, 2025).

Maryland

A proposed bill would require a landlord to provide a prospective tenant with an itemized list that clearly identifies all fees that a landlord may impose on the prospective tenant that includes the basis for the fee, the amount, whether the fee is mandatory or optional and when the fee is due. The landlord would not be able to impose any mandatory fee that was not disclosed (HB 1257, 2025). The bill died.

Tennessee

A proposed bill in Tennessee would require a landlord to disclose all fees charged in addition to rent *prior* to the prospective tenant's submission of an application. The bill failed. (SB 1893, 2024).

Regulating Pre-Tenancy Fees

Application Screening Fees

Background

An application fee or application screening fee may be charged so a landlord can offset the cost of obtaining information about a prospective tenant. Information requested and obtained by landlords may include personal reference checks, consumer credit reports, and background checks. States define application fees differently, but it most commonly refers to application screening fees, such as fees for background checks, that are paid by the tenant for the purpose of being considered as a tenant for a rental unit.

Renters facing existing challenges, such as criminal history, past evictions, or housing debt, may pay these fees repeatedly before being accepted as tenants. The average application screening fee in the United States is $50 (Dunn, 2022) and roughly two-thirds of renters pay nonrefundable rental application fees when searching for new housing (Garcia, 2021).

Recent legislative regulation of application fees attempts to strike a balance between giving landlords a functional mechanism to examine potential tenants and lessening financial hurdles in the housing market. States have taken various approaches, including

capping fees or eliminating them entirely. However, most states do not place a statutory limit on application fees[3]. Several states have also introduced reusable tenant screening reports to ease the financial burden on tenants.

Reusable/Portable Tenant Screening Reports (TSRs)

State and federal policymakers have promoted reusable tenant screening reports as a potential solution to the repeated cost of rental application fees. At least seven states allow a tenant to produce a portable (also known as reusable) tenant screening report to a landlord instead of paying an additional fee for each landlord to access a report or screen an applicant. Essentially, renters could pay a one-time fee to obtain a report they can reuse throughout their housing search instead of paying separate application fees for each application. The laws enacted that allow reusable tenant screening reports feature two different compliance structures: 1) mandatory acceptance of compliant reports by landlords; or 2) allow landlords to choose whether to accept the report rather than collecting a fee. Portable tenant screening report policies also typically contain a provision defining a maximum period of time in which the report remains valid.

Code of Virginia

§ 55.1-1203. Application; deposit, fee, and additional information.

A. **Any landlord may require a refundable application deposit in addition to a nonrefundable application fee.** If the applicant fails to rent the unit for which application was made, from the application deposit the landlord shall refund to the applicant within 20 days after the applicant's failure to rent the unit or the landlord's rejection of the application all sums in excess of the landlord's actual expenses and damages together with an itemized list of such expenses and damages. If, however, the application deposit was made by cash, certified check, cashier's check, or postal money order, such refund shall be made within 10 days of the applicant's failure to rent the unit if the failure to rent is due to the landlord's rejection of the application. If the landlord fails to comply with this section, the applicant may recover as damages suffered by him that portion of the application deposit wrongfully withheld and reasonable attorney fees.

C. 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 that is a public housing unit or other housing unit subject to regulation by the U.S. 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.

[3] States without a form of cost restriction on application screening fees: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah.

Summary of Findings

- Most states do not place a specific statutory limit on the amount a landlord can charge for an application screening fee.
- Virginia, Connecticut, and New Mexico cap this fee at $50. Virginia also allows landlords to charge any actual third-party costs in addition to the $50 fee.
- Several states, including Maryland, New York, and Wisconsin have a fixed application fee cap that is lower than Virginia's $50 cap. Delaware's law is unique as the cap is set at the greater of $50 or 10% of the monthly rent.
- Massachusetts and Vermont have enacted laws that effectively prohibit landlords from charging an application screening fee. Out of the states studied, Vermont is the most clear and concise ban.
    - While Massachusetts passed this prohibition, it contains an exemption for licensed real estate brokers that may result in the same net cost being passed onto the tenant.
- Many states limit application screening fees to the actual cost of obtaining the screening report and require that tenants be refunded any portion of unused fees (Colorado, California, Hawaii, Minnesota, Washington, Wisconsin). This model often mandates transparency requirements that include itemized receipts. California, Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, Oregon, and Washington set the cap at the actual cost incurred by the landlord for an application screening.
    - New Mexico and New Hampshire require landlords to refund any application fees if the unit is offered to a different tenant, or if the owner does not process the screening fee.
- California, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, New York, Rhode Island, and Washington have all passed some sort of portable tenant screening report legislation. In states like Colorado, Illinois, New York and Rhode Island, landlords are prohibited from charging an application fee if a tenant provides a valid report. However, California, Maryland, and Washington do not require landlords to accept these portable reports, and many landlords choose not to accept these reports.
    - A similar bill was introduced in Virginia's 2022 session but did not pass. The bill would have allowed an applicant to provide a portable tenant screening report to a landlord in lieu of paying for an application fee (HB 804, 2022).
- Variable cost caps, rather than fixed, allow the fees to adjust to market considerations and may provide more flexibility for landlords to cover their actual costs.

Table 1: Rental Application Fee Limitations by Selected States

State	Statutory Limit & Mechanism	Refund Required?
California	Variable cap + CPI adjusted (around $69 now) and TSR option if landlord accepts TSRs	Yes (unused portion)
Colorado	Actual cost/ TSR mandate (no fee if TSR is provided)	Yes (unused portion)
Delaware	Cap at $50 or 10% of monthly rent	
Hawaii	Actual cost of obtaining information	Yes (unused portion)
Illinois	TSR Mandate (no fee if TSR is provided)	
Maine	Actual cost	
Maryland	$25 or actual cost, whichever is less (no fee if TSR is accepted)	Yes (unused portion if fee is more than $25)
Massachusetts	Prohibition (exception for licensed brokers)	
Minnesota	Actual cost	Yes (unused portion)
New Hampshire	None	Yes
New Mexico	Fixed $50 cap	Yes
New York	Fixed $20 cap/TSR mandate (no fee if TSR is provided)	Yes (unused portion)
Rhode Island	Prohibition and Actual cost/TSR mandate (no fee if TSR is provided)	
Vermont	Prohibition	
Virginia	Fixed cap $50 + actual third-party cost (for public housing applicants the fee cap is $32)	No
Washington	Actual cost	Yes (unused portion)
Wisconsin	Fixed $25 cap	

Existing Laws

California

In California, the law limits rental application screening fees to the landlord's actual out-of-pocket expenses plus a reasonable value for their time spent on the process, such as obtaining a credit report. The fee is capped at a base amount that is adjusted annually for inflation; as of 2025, this maximum fee is approximately $69.50 per applicant. When a landlord collects this fee, they must provide the applicant with a copy of their consumer report along with an itemized receipt of the costs incurred (CA Civ Code § 1950.6, 2025).

To legally charge a screening fee, a landlord must meet several conditions. First, a landlord cannot charge a fee if they know that no rental unit is available or will be available within a reasonable period. Second, the landlord must follow one of two specific screening procedures. The first option is a "first-come, first-served" model, where applications are considered in order they are received against pre-disclosed written criteria, and applicants are only charged when their application is actually being reviewed. The second option allows a landlord to consider multiple applicants at once but requires them to refund the entire screening fee to any applicant who is not selected for the tenancy (AB 2493, 2025).

Colorado

Landlords in Colorado may not charge a prospective tenant a rental application fee unless the entire fee is used to cover the landlord’s cost in processing the rental application (Section 38-12-903, 2024).

Colorado law states that landlords are required to accept portable screening reports from potential tenants. The tenants may reuse their rental applications for up to 30 days with no additional costs. This law was amended in 2025 to allow landlords to require 1) that the screening report is made available at no added cost to the landlord; 2) that the screening report is made available directly to the landlord by a third-party reporting agency; and 3) a statement from the prospective tenant stating that there has not been any material changes to information contained in the report (C.R.S. 38-12-904, 2025).

Additional provisions of relevant Colorado statutes include:

- The landlord’s costs must be based on either the actual expense the landlord incurs in processing the rental application or the average expense the landlord incurs per prospective tenant while processing multiple rental applications.
- Landlords cannot charge a prospective tenant a rental application fee if the tenant provides the landlord with a tenant screening report.
- If the landlord does not use the entire amount of the fee to cover the costs of processing the rental application fee, it must be remitted to the prospective tenant. The landlord must make a good-faith effort to remit any unused amount within twenty days of processing the application.

Connecticut

In Connecticut a landlord or property owner cannot charge a tenant more than $50 for a tenant screening report (Senate Bill No. 998, 2023). Landlords are prohibited from charging prospective tenants an application fee but may charge a $50 fee for a tenant screening report.

Delaware

Delaware law permits a landlord to charge an application fee to determine a tenant's creditworthiness. The fee may not exceed the greater of either 10% of the monthly rent or $50. When a landlord charges this fee, they must provide a receipt to the tenant. If a landlord unlawfully charges more than the allowable amount, the tenant is entitled to recover damages equal to double the amount charged (Del. Code Ann. tit. 25, § 5514(d)).

Illinois

Illinois law prohibits landlords from charging prospective tenants an application screening fee if they provide a reusable tenant screening report. Like Colorado’s law, the report must be prepared within the last 30 days by a consumer credit reporting agency and be freely and directly available to the landlord or through a reliable third-party website. A landlord may also require a statement from the prospective tenant stating that there has not been any material changes to information contained in the report (HB 4926, 2024).

New Mexico

In New Mexico, a landlord is prohibited from charging more than $50 for a screening fee. If a prospective tenant is charged a screening fee but the unit is offered to a different tenant, or the owner does not process the screening fee, the applicant may be refunded their fee. (SB 267, 2025).

New Hampshire

New Hampshire does not have a statutory cap or restriction on the amount a landlord can charge for a rental application fee. If a landlord collects an application fee from a prospective tenant, but the unit is not rented to that applicant, the landlord shall return any amount beyond the actual cost of the documented background check, credit check, and/or reasonable administrative costs to the applicant within 30 days of receipt (House Bill 283, 2024).

Maine

Maine's law specifies that landlords can only charge fees that cover the actual cost of processing tenant background screening reports (§6030-H of Title 14, Chapter 710 of the Maine Revised Statutes).

Maryland

In Maryland, a landlord can charge an application fee of up to $25 or the actual cost of processing the application, whichever is less. Maryland law states that if a landlord requires an application fee from a prospective tenant that exceeds $25, the landlord must return the portion of the fee that was not actually expended for a credit check or application processing. A landlord who fails to return the unexpended portion of the fee is liable to the tenant for twice the amount of the fees in damages (Md. Code, Real Prop. § 8-213). Additionally, if a landlord accepts a portable tenant screening report provided by the applicant, the landlord may not charge an application fee. These provisions do not apply to landlords who offer four or fewer dwelling units for rent at one location, or to seasonal or condominium rentals.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts law explicitly prohibits landlords from charging rental application fees (Section 15B). A landlord in Massachusetts may not require a tenant to pay for any added costs beyond the following four items:

1. Rent for the first full month of occupancy
2. Rent for the last full month of occupancy
3. A security deposit equal to the first month's rent
4. The purchase and installation cost for a key and lock.

As this list does not include a type of application screening fee, landlords are prohibited from charging prospective tenants these fees. However, a licensed broker, not a landlord, may charge an application screening fee. This exception is often criticized as undermining the statute's intent to shield prospective tenants from the screening costs.

New York

The New York State Real Property Law § 238-a caps rental application fees at $20 and that fee can be waived if the applicant provides a recently conducted background or credit check (NY Real Property Law § 238-a., 2024).

Rhode Island

Rhode Island law prohibits charging fees for rental applications (R.I. Gen. Laws § 34-18-59, 2024). The law does not however prohibit landlords from requiring an official state criminal background check or from requiring a credit check. If a prospective tenant provides an official state criminal background check and or credit report issued within 90 days of the application for the rental unit, the landlord cannot charge any fee. If the prospective tenant does not provide the required documents the landlord may charge a fee no more than the actual cost of obtaining the official state background check and/or credit report. Any prospective tenant who is charged a fee for obtaining a criminal background check and/or credit report must be provided with a copy of the check/report. Additionally, landlords can obtain independent background checks or credit reports at the landlord's own expense.

Vermont

Vermont law explicitly prohibits landlords from collecting application fees for residential dwelling units (9 V.S.A. § 4456a, 2025).

Washington

In Washington, the law stipulates that an application screening fee may not exceed the landlord's actual cost for the screening service (RCW 59.18.257). Prior to collecting any fee, landlords are required to provide the applicant with written notice detailing the

scope of the screening, the specific criteria that could lead to a denial, and the contact information for the screening service being used. The law requires a full refund of the fee if the landlord fails to conduct a screening. While landlords are not obligated to accept portable screening reports, they are prohibited from charging an additional screening fee if they choose to accept one.

Vermont

Vermont prohibits landlords from charging application fees to any prospective tenants (9 V.S.A. § 4456a, 2025)

Miscellaneous Pre-Tenancy Fees

Connecticut

Connecticut law prohibits landlords from charging a move in or move-out fee (Senate Bill 998, 2023).

Non-refundable move-in fees are typically charged to cover administrative or turnover costs such as key changes, cleaning, or application processing.

Regulating Security Deposit Fees

How does Virginia Compare?

Virginia law permits landlords to collect a security deposit up to a maximum of two months' periodic rent (VA § 55.1-1226). This cap is higher than in some other states that limit the amount. However, around half of all states have no legal limit on the amount a landlord can require for a security deposit. With the average effective rent in Virginia trending beyond $1,800 per month in 2025 (Naik, 2025), the average maximum permissible security deposit is around $3,600. Compared to states that impose one-month limits, like Alabama, Nebraska and New York, this creates an additional financial burden for potential tenants seeking rental housing. All states permit property owners to collect security deposits.

In Virginia, landlords have 45 days to return the security deposit to a tenant moving out of a unit, assuming no damage has occurred. This deadline is longer than the typical 30-day return policy implemented by most other states that regulate security deposits. Additionally, some states have imposed a 14-day limit to allow for rapid turnover and prevent delays to a tenant's ability to move, as tenants often need to secure funds for a new deposit (New York, Nebraska, South Dakota). A shorter window to return a deposit may improve a tenant's ability to move without excessive financial burdens. Conversely, Alabama, Arkansas, and West Virginia allow up to 60 days for a landlord to return a security deposit to a tenant.

At least 14 states[4] require landlords to pay interest on security deposits held for over six months. Virginia used to require landlords to hold tenants' security deposits in an account that generates interest. However, that requirement was eliminated in 2014 (HB 273, 2014).

The chart below shows security deposit limits in selected states based on standard leases. There are often exceptions for month-to-month leases or long-term leases beyond one year. Additionally, some states create exceptions for their security deposit caps for pet deposits, undoing tenant alterations, and deposits to cover tenant activities that increase liability risks (ex. Alabama).

Table 2: Security Deposit Limits in Selected States

Maximum Limit for Security Deposit Fee	States
1 Months' Rent	Alabama, California*, Hawaii, Kansas, Maryland*, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, North Dakota
1.5 Months' Rent	Arizona, Michigan, New Jersey
2 Month's Rent	Alaska, Arkansas, California*, Colorado, Connecticut*, Georgia, Iowa, Maine, Missouri, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia
3 Months' Rent	Nevada
No Limit	Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming

*Indicates the existence of a statewide exemption from security deposit caps

[4] Arizona, Connecticut, Iowa, Illinois, Florida, Ohio, North Dakota, Minnesota, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts all require landlords to pay interest on security deposits.

Alabama

Alabama law limits security deposit fees to no more than one-month's rent (AL Code § 35-9A-201, 2025).

California

California law limits security deposit fees to no more than one-months' rent. However, there is an exception for smaller landlords. Landlords who own no more than two residential rental properties with no more than four rental units total may charge an amount equal to two months' rent (California Civil Code 1950.1, 2025). Under AB 2801, for all new leases commencing on or after July 1, 2025, pictures must be taken of the rental unit's condition prior to tenant occupancy. Additionally, landlords must take and store photographs immediately after a tenant vacates and another set of photos once the repairs or cleaning services are completed especially if deductions from the security deposit are being taken (AB 2801, 2025). Another provision of the bill states that the landlord cannot charge the tenant or claim the security deposit for professional cleaning services "unless reasonably necessary to return the premises to the condition it was at the inception of tenancy, exclusive of ordinary wear and tear."

Connecticut

In Connecticut, a security deposit is limited to a maximum of two months' rent for tenants under the age of 62 and one month's rent for tenants 60 years or older (Sec. 47a-21., 2025). Landlords must return the deposit, with any accrued interest, within 30 days of the tenancy ending.

Colorado

Colorado prohibits a landlord from requiring a tenant to submit a security deposit in any amount that exceeds the cost of two monthly rent payments (Stat. 38-12-102.5, 2024).

Georgia

As of 2024, Georgia limits security deposits to no more than two months' rent (§ 44-7-30.1, 2024).

Kansas

Kansas prohibits landlords from charging more than one month of rent for a security deposit. A landlord may charge up to one and a half months rent if the unit is furnished or allows pets (KRS 58-2550, 2025).

Massachusetts

Massachusetts law limits the amount a landlord can collect in security deposit fees to an amount equal to first month's rent (Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 186 § 15, 2024).

Maryland

Maryland's 2024 Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act included limiting security deposits to a maximum of one month's rent. However, a landlord may charge up to two months' rent if the tenant receives qualifying utility assistance and makes their utility payments directly to the landlord (HB 698, 2024).

New Mexico

New Mexico only places a limit on security deposits for rental agreements of a duration less than one year. For lease terms less than one year, a landlord may not collect a deposit greater than one month's rent (Stat § 47-8-18, 2024).

North Carolina

North Carolina limits the amount landlords can charge for a security deposit based on types of leases.

The security deposit shall not exceed an amount equal to two weeks' rent if a tenancy is week to week, one and one-half months' rent if a tenancy is month to month, and two months' rent for terms greater than month to month.

Pennsylvania

In Pennsylvania, the security deposit can be no more than two months' rent for the first year. However, if the tenant stays in the same place for more than one year the landlord can charge no more than one month of rent as a security deposit. (Stat. § 250.511a to 250.512, 2025).

Opt-Out Provisions and Regulating Fees for Ongoing Additional Goods and Services

Summary of Findings

The current residential rental market has undergone an increase in the mandatory billing and bundling of auxiliary services like trash valet, media packages, and common area utilities. In response to this growing practice, advocates at the national and state level have repeatedly proposed measures that would require landlords to provide tenants with the right to “opt out” of specific bundled services.

Comprehensive analysis of these legislative attempts shows that these proposals come with many challenges and have largely failed to pass. The complexities of bulk billing arrangements, service provision burdens on property owners and third parties, and financial implications for property owners often make these policy proposals conceptually challenging to enact, despite popularity with consumers.

Internet Bulk Billing Arrangements in Residential Rental Properties

Bulk billing arrangements are when a company agrees to provide service to every tenant of a building. The tenants are then billed a prorated share of the total costs. A landlord essentially purchases broadband access at wholesale rates that typically includes broadband and/or TV access for all tenants as part of the cost of rent. In bulk billing arrangements tenants may make payments to the landlord or to the service provider. The FCC does not currently prohibit mandatory bulk billing arrangements for internet services in apartment buildings[5].

Legislation targeting aspects of these bulk billing arrangements has been mostly unsuccessful at both the state and Federal levels. The economies of scale built into the bulk billing system allows landlords to obtain service below traditional retail values and the mandatory enrollment is a revenue guarantee for service providers.

Enacted Legislation

Colorado

Colorado places limits on the fee markups or charges for services for which the owner is billed by a third party (HB 23-1095, 2023). The amount charged may not exceed two percent of the amount the owner was billed or a total of ten dollars per month. Colorado’s model allows landlords to mandate a service while preventing the use of third-party services as a significant profit generator.

Under Colorado law, landlords are subject to specific regulations when charging fees for additional goods and services. Colorado law explicitly forbids a rental agreement from defining any fee as "rent," with the sole exception of the fixed monthly payment for occupancy (§ 38-12-801(3)(a)(V)). The law also prohibits landlords from charging a tenant any amount more than what the landlord was billed by a third-party provider for a service plus an additional two percent (§ 38-12-801(3)(a)(VI)). Consequently, a landlord cannot initiate an eviction proceeding against a tenant for the non-payment of these ancillary service fees; a landlord's recourse is limited to treating the amount as a debt that may be pursued in civil court.

Connecticut

Connecticut mandates that a landlord cannot charge any fee to a tenant other than a security deposit fee, a tenant screening report fee, and a fee to obtain a key to a unit. Landlords cannot charge extra fees for utilities unless the tenant has a separate account with the utility company or the landlord is billing the tenant at actual cost without profit. This means that fees like water, sewer, and trash must be included in the base rent or charged based on actual usage.

Oregon

In Oregon (ORS 90.222) a landlord may not require a tenant to obtain or maintain renter’s liability insurance if the household income of the tenant is equal to or less than 50 percent of the AMI., or if the tenant’s unit has been subsidized with public funds (ORS § 90.222).

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[5] In 2024 the FCC proposed the regulation of bulk billing for internet in apartment complexes to allow tenants to opt out of their landlord’s selected internet service provider. In January 2025, the current FCC chair eliminated that proposal from consideration. The elimination or regulation of bulk billing would likely face legal obstacles as the regulatory authority of the FCC to enforce a rule of this nature is often debated.

Proposed Legislation

Massachusetts

In 2025 Massachusetts introduced a bill to regulate and prohibit various fees landlords can charge tenants in rental housing (Bill H.1553, 2025). The bill would prohibit landlords from requiring costs or fees in addition to the rent in residential leases. Costs and fees that are prohibited from being included in the lease agreement include amenity fees, internet fees, and fees related to renters and liability insurance. The bill states that any costs or fees must be optional, and the tenant may agree to any such costs or fees in writing. The written agreement must contain instructions for how the tenant can cancel or opt out of the provided good or service. If the tenant decides they want the goods or services provided by the additional fees or costs, the optional fees may be included in the rent where the tenant's rent is subsidized by a third party. Additionally, landlords would be banned from charging fees for lease renewals, tenant substitutions, and holding over a lease term. This legislation is pending.

California

A bill proposed in California would require landlords to describe in any advertisement, offer, or display, a description of all available optional services and associated fees for each optional housing service. The bill states that a landlord may not condition an offer to rent, a tenancy, or terms of tenancy, on whether a tenant chooses to opt out or cancel an optional service (AB 1248, 2025).

An additional proposed bill would prohibit a landlord from requiring a tenant to subscribe to a specific internet service provider. If the landlord violates that provision, the tenant may deduct the cost of the subscription to the provider from the rent (AB 1414, 2025).

New York

New York has introduced many[6] versions of legislation that would prohibit landlords from including additional services, including cable and internet service, in a tenant's base rent. The legislation has not passed. The most recent version of this legislation was introduced in New York's 2025-2026 Session (A1768, 2025). The bill would prohibit landlords from requiring payment for nonessential services in a tenant's base rent. In this legislation, nonessential services included cable television and internet services. Additionally, the bill allows landlords to provide nonessential services only if a tenant agrees to such services in an agreement separate from a primary lease agreement. The provisions of this proposed legislation do not apply to buildings that contain less than three residential dwelling units.

Failed Legislation

Texas

SB 974 was introduced in 2023 and would have prohibited leases in multifamily buildings from containing charges for internet or cable services as part of the payment due under the lease. The bill would also prohibit leases from including provisions that require tenants to subscribe to internet or cable services. Under the proposed bill, landlords who violate the provisions of the bill may be required to pay the tenant $500 plus any associated court costs and attorney's fees (SB 974, 2023). The bill did not pass.

Arizona

In 2023 Arizona introduced a bill that would have required landlords to allow tenants to opt-out of nonessential services (HB2083, 2023). Under the provisions of the proposed legislation, a tenant may choose not to receive and pay for any nonessential services, including valet services related to trash or recycling, smart home fees, or fees for similar devices or services. The bill did not pass.

In 2024, a proposed bill would have required landlords to allow tenants to opt out of nonessential services, like valet trash (HB 2268, 2024). The bill died. The bill would have also required landlords to disclose all additional fees in any advertisement that provides a rental rate.

[6] Versions of this legislation were introduced in 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2023. All versions did not pass.

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