

Security Deposit Move-Out Checklist (2026)

The deadline-driven steps for tenants, and the paperwork that protects landlords

Deposit fights are won with documentation and deadlines. Work the side that applies to you.

TENANTS - BEFORE AND AT MOVE-OUT

- Look up your state's cap and return deadline in the table; note the statute citation.
- Photograph or video every room, inside appliances, and existing damage, with timestamps.
- Give your forwarding address IN WRITING when you return keys (in several states the refund clock will not start without it).
- Request a walk-through inspection where offered; get any promises in writing.

TENANTS - IF THE DEADLINE PASSES

- Send a demand letter citing your state statute and the deadline that was missed.
- Note your state's penalty (double or triple damages in many states) in the letter.
- If ignored, small claims court covers nearly every deposit; bring the photos and the letter.

LANDLORDS - CHARGING AND HOLDING

- Confirm your state's cap, and whether pet deposits or last month's rent count toward it.
- Hold the deposit where your state requires (escrow/trust states: GA, MA, NJ, OK, AK, ME, DC).
- If you are in an interest state, calendar the annual interest obligation.

LANDLORDS - AT RETURN TIME

- Calendar the statutory deadline from the day the tenant delivers possession.
- Send the itemized statement inside the window even if the tenant owes more than the deposit; missing paperwork forfeits deductions in most states.
- Deduct only beyond normal wear and tear, and keep receipts or contractor invoices for every line.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

Keep this checklist with your lease file. The verified 50-state table, CSV dataset, and deposit letter templates live at clearlegaltips.com/security-deposit-limits-by-state/