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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Connecticut Fair Housing Center Launches Online Tool to Improve Housing Access for People with Disabilities

Hartford, CT – The Connecticut Fair Housing Center launched a new tool this week to help Connecticut residents with disabilities learn about and better enforce their fair housing rights. The *Disability Letter Generator* is a simple, step-by-step online tool that automatically creates requests to landlords or other housing providers regarding reasonable accommodations or modifications that will allow them to better access and enjoy their housing unit. This free resource can be found at www.ctfairhousing.org/raletters.

A *reasonable accommodation* is a change or exception to a rule, policy, or practice, such as allowing a service animal in a non-pet building or re-assigning a parking spot closer to one's apartment. People with disabilities may also request *reasonable modifications*, which are changes to the housing unit itself, such as installing a wheelchair ramp or flashing doorbell.

Under the law, it is illegal for housing providers to deny most of these requests. Landlords also typically cannot require tenants to meet additional requirements or pay extra fees for such accommodations. In the case of modifications, landlords are usually not responsible for costs, but must allow the tenant to make the changes.

In 2014, Charlyn* called the Connecticut Fair Housing Center for help obtaining a reasonable accommodation because her landlord refused to make an exception to her building's pet security deposit policy for her emotional support animal. "Because it wasn't a visible disability, they wouldn't waive the [deposit] fee," which was quite high, Charlyn says. "I knew it was illegal, but I didn't know where to go for help."

After talking with the Center's staff, Charlyn drafted a letter asking that her landlord waive the pet deposit as a reasonable accommodation to her disability. Shortly after she submitted the request, her landlord agreed to waive the fee. This minor change in the landlord's rules and policies has had a great impact on Charlyn's quality of life. She says that having an emotional support animal "has helped me a lot to get out of myself, and see things from a different point of view. It has helped me through some of the harder times... those days where I don't want to leave the house." She adds that, had the new online letter generator tool been available when she was first experiencing the issue with her landlord, "It could have helped me deal with this situation a lot quicker from the start."

Like Charlyn, many people with disabilities across Connecticut may be unaware of their fair housing rights, or may be unsure of how to request accommodations or modifications. The Center created the Disability Letter Generator with the goal of empowering more people with disabilities across the state to enforce their fair housing rights and request accommodations that could improve their quality of life.

"Stories like Charlyn's are far too common. Disability discrimination is a prevalent and pervasive problem," said Melvin Kelley, a Staff Attorney with the Center. "This tool is part of a multifaceted strategy designed to bring us one small step closer to realizing the Center's lofty goal of eliminating housing discrimination."

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The new online tool guides users through a brief series of questions to determine if a reasonable accommodation is right for them, then produces a personalized request letter they can send to their housing provider. For people with “invisible” disabilities, like Charlyn, there is also a way to create a form for the person’s doctor to complete verifying the need for the accommodation or modification.

The *Disability Letter Generator* tool can be accessed at www.ctfairhousing.org/raletters by residents seeking an accommodation or by others who might be assisting someone with this process.

**last name withheld to protect privacy*

The Connecticut Fair Housing Center is a statewide nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to identifying, challenging and eliminating discrimination in housing through education, research, testing, counseling, enforcement, and advocacy.

For more about our work, please visit www.ctfairhousing.org.

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