

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA REAL ESTATE COMMISSION

Consumer Protection Alert



Scammers Are Targeting Individuals Searching for Housing Online



Searching for apartments and housing online can be a convenient and efficient way to locate your next residence. This searching method allows the viewing of multiple property listings in a short time frame and it also allows you to quickly secure housing in a competitive market. However, as with any online transaction, it is important to protect yourself.

Online apartment/housing seekers have become targets of scammers who are posing as licensed real estate agents, property managers, and property owners. These criminals are creating legitimate-looking online posts and leases for unavailable properties and are absconding with security deposits paid for the fraudulent property.

Here are a few steps to protect yourself when searching for an apartment/housing rental online:

- 1** Verify you are completing your transaction with a DC licensed real estate agent. To search for a DC Real Estate Commission (DCREC) license, go to www.dcopla.com/realestate. You can search for an agent by license number or name under the "License Lookup" section.
- 2** Do as much research as possible on the agent to verify their contact information (ex. email, telephone number, and office address). Simple web searches can reveal this information.
- 3** Request to view the property.
- 4** Whenever possible, avoid wire transfers or electronic funds transfers (EFTs) and try to use alternatives like cashier's checks or make payments in person by check or credit card and get a receipt.

If you feel that you have been victimized, contact your financial institution immediately.

If you are unsure if the individual is licensed, contact the DCREC by phone, email, or online verify a license:

1100 4th Street, SW | Suite 500
Washington, DC 20024
202-442-4320
Email: dcra.dcopla@dc.gov
Online: www.dcopla.com/realestate

If the individual is not licensed, you can file a complaint with the DCRA Regulatory Investigations Section (RIS).

1100 4th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024
202-442-8676

Online: <https://dcra.dc.gov/regulatory-investigations>

