

## **GLA May 2026 Meeting on Tenant Screenings**

Video Link to Meeting:


<https://youtu.be/bvovqAEuEyw>

Starting on the next page is John's PowerPoint presentation in full.


# Tenant Screening

Best Practices & Common Pitfalls

Presentation by John Doss | Doss & Spaulding Properties



Raise your hand if you've ever rented to a tenant  
you later regretted placing...



# Why Screening Matters

- A bad tenant placement can cost \$5,000 - \$15,000+ (lost rent, damage, eviction, legal fees, turnover, vacancy)
- NC eviction process is faster than most states — but still 4-8 weeks and costly
- Discrimination claims can run \$10K-\$50K+ even when you didn't mean to discriminate
- Best defense: a written, consistent process applied to every applicant the same way
- Goal tonight: a screening process that's defensible, repeatable, and weeds out the wrong people before they sign



# Standardized Application Process



# Why a Written, Repeatable Process

- Fair housing protection: same questions, same criteria, every applicant
- Defensibility: if a denied applicant complains, you can show the file
- Speed: reduces back-and-forth and shortens vacancy
- Reduces emotional decisions — you're not negotiating against yourself
- Sets expectations early — serious applicants appreciate clarity, fraudsters don't

# Publicly Listed Screening Criteria

- Income: typically 3x monthly rent in gross verifiable income (set your number, apply it to everyone)
- Credit score floor: e.g., 650 minimum (publish your number)
- Eviction history: lookback period (e.g., no evictions in past 7 years)
- Criminal history: individualized review — not a blanket ban (more on this in fair housing)
- Rental history: 5-7 years of past residences, or co-signer / extra deposit if not
- Write it down, attach it to your application, and don't change it mid-cycle



# What Every Application Should Collect

## Required Information

- Full legal name + DOB
- Government-issued photo ID
- Social Security Number
- Current + prior addresses (prev 5-7 years)
- Employment + income history (prev 2 years)
- Emergency contact(s)
- All occupants 18+ submit an application

## Authorizations & Disclosures

- Signed authorization to verify income, employment, rental history
- Signed authorization for credit + background check
- Disclosure: what fee covers, refund policy
- List of all pets / assistance animals
- Pet photos + vet records (for pets)
- Vehicle info (make, model, plate)
- Bankruptcy / eviction / criminal disclosure



# Fair Housing



# Federal Protected Classes

- Race
- Color
- National origin
- Religion
- Sex (to include sexual orientation and gender identity)
- Familial status (presence of children under 18, pregnant women)
- Disability (physical or mental)
  
- First violation up to \$26,262
- Second violation up to \$65,653

# NC + Greensboro Additions

- NC State Fair Housing Act mirrors the 7 federal classes (NC GS Chapter 41A)
- Source of income (housing vouchers, Section 8): NOT a protected class in NC
- Age: not federally protected for housing, but tread carefully — 'no young people' messaging can trigger familial status claims
- Marital status: NOT a protected class in NC — but treat unmarried couples consistently
- When in doubt: apply your written criteria and document the decision

# Pitfall #1 – Advertising Language

## Don't Say

- "Perfect for a single professional"
- "No kids" / "Adults only" / "Mature tenants"
- "Christian home" / "Christian family"
- "English speakers preferred"
- "Walking distance to [specific church/school]"
- "Master bedroom" (avoided by some — use 'primary')
- "Couples only" / "Singles only"

## Do Say

- Describe the property, not the tenant
- "3BR / 2BA, 1,400 sqft, fenced yard"
- "Close proximity to parks, shopping, and amenities"
- "\$1,500/month, 12-month lease"
- "0.5 mile distance to Grimsley High School"
- "Equal Housing Opportunity" disclaimer
- "Pet-friendly with pet fee" (if applicable)
- List your written screening criteria

# Pitfall #2 – Steering & Inconsistency

- Steering: pushing applicants toward or away from properties/neighborhoods based on a protected class
  - Example: "I think this house will have too many steps for you, you should look at our home on 123 Main St instead." → steering
- Inconsistent rules: requiring pay stubs from some applicants but not others
- Inconsistent showings: ghosting one caller, scheduling fast for another
- Inconsistent criteria: bending the income requirement for some, not others
- Even unintentional bias becomes a paper trail if applicants ever compare notes

# Pitfall #3 – Disparate Impact

- A neutral-sounding rule that disproportionately excludes a protected class can still violate FHA
  - Classic example: blanket criminal background ban — disparately impacts Black/Hispanic applicants per HUD
- HUD 2016 guidance: criminal history requires individualized review (nature, severity, time elapsed, rehabilitation)
- Other risk areas: blanket eviction bans, blanket bankruptcy bans, very high income multiples in low-wage markets
- Safer approach: time-limit the lookback (e.g., 7 years), exclude arrests-without-conviction, allow individualized appeal
- Document the business justification for any criteria that screens hard



# Assistance Animals

# Service Animal vs. Emotional Support Animal

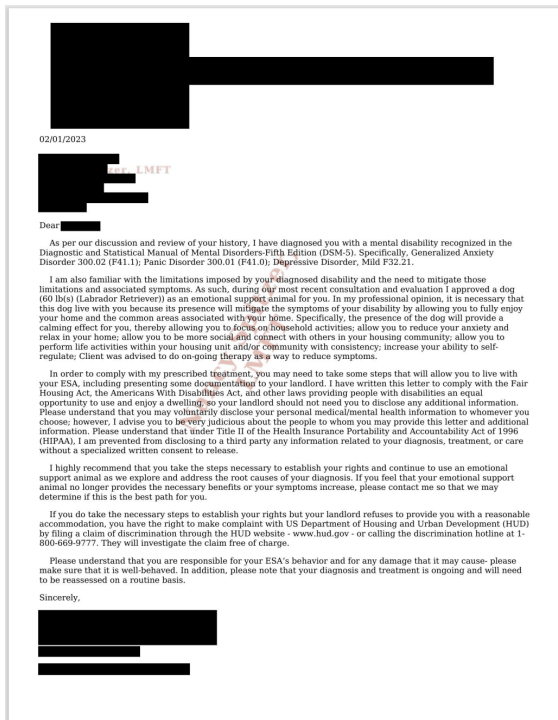
## Service Animal (ADA)

- Almost always a dog (sometimes mini horse)
- Individually trained to perform a specific task tied to a disability
- Examples: guide dog, seizure-alert, PTSD service dog
- Required to be allowed in housing AND public places
- Not a 'pet' — no pet rules apply

## Emotional Support Animal (FHA)

- Any species, no specific training required
- Provides emotional support that alleviates a disability (e.g. depression, anxiety, etc)
- Protected under Fair Housing Act for housing only (not public places)
- Treated as an 'assistance animal' for housing purposes
- Not a 'pet' — no pet rules apply

# Identify The Valid ESA Document



A

B

## U.S. Registered Support Animal

Handler of this Support Animal ID Card meets one of the following requirements under the ADA; American with Disabilities Act, Air Carrier Act, Fair Housing Act or the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The handler and support animal

Name: Amy Hyer  
Animal Name: Pete  
Breed: Brussels Griffon  
State: FL  
ID Number: 5555555555



To Verify Registration Visit Online or Scan QR Code  
[www.USAServiceDogRegistration.com](http://www.USAServiceDogRegistration.com)

## Emotional Support Animal



C

# ESA Documentation – What to Watch For

- **Red flag:** instant-purchase 'ESA letter' from a website you've never heard of, dated last week
- **Red flag:** provider in a different state who has never met the tenant
- **Red flag:** generic template with no specifics about the person or the disability-related need
- **Yellow flag:** telehealth provider — fine, but verify the provider has a real treating relationship
- **Green flag:** letter from a local doctor, therapist, or social worker who clearly knows the patient
- If documentation is suspect, you may request additional reliable documentation — but don't deny outright without engaging
- Consider using a third party service like [petscreening.com](https://petscreening.com) or [ourpetpolicy.com](https://ourpetpolicy.com)

# What You CAN Ask

- If the disability is OBVIOUS or KNOWN: don't ask anything — just accommodate
- For service animals (per ADA, two questions only): (1) Is the animal required because of a disability? (2) What work or task is it trained to perform?
- If the disability is NOT obvious: you may request reliable documentation that (a) the person has a disability and (b) the animal addresses a disability-related need
- Reliable documentation = a letter from a treating professional (doctor, therapist, social worker) who has actual knowledge of the person and is licensed to practice in NC
- You can ask for vaccination records and that the animal not be a direct threat — same as any tenant

# What You CANNOT Do

- Charge pet rent, pet deposit, or pet fee for an assistance animal
- Enforce breed restrictions, weight limits, or species bans (within reason)
- Require certification, registration, ID card, or 'official' training documentation
- Demand the specific diagnosis or medical records
- Apply a 'no pets' policy to deny — assistance animals aren't considered pets
- Charge extra rent or higher security deposit because of the animal
- Refuse the request without engaging in the interactive process

# List of Commonly Restricted Breeds (Pets)

- Pit bull–type dogs
- American Staffordshire Terrier
- Staffordshire Bull Terrier
- Rottweiler
- Doberman Pinscher
- German Shepherd
- Chow Chow
- Akita
- Siberian Husky
- Alaskan Malamute
- Presa Canario
- Wolf hybrids / wolf-dog mixes
- Great Dane
- Mastiff / Bullmastiff
- American Bulldog



# Rental Fraud



# Why Fraud Is Rampant

- AI tools can generate convincing pay stubs, bank statements, and W-2s in seconds — for free
- Identity theft is up — applicants using stolen SSNs to pass credit checks
- Fake references: friends, family and/or paid services that role-play as 'previous landlords'
- Best defense: verify with sources YOU find — not the contacts the applicant gave you

# Reference Fraud

- Most common scam: applicant lists a friend, parent, or roommate as the 'previous landlord'
- Verify ownership: look up the property on the tax records — is the listed reference actually the owner or a licensed agent/PM company?
- Cross-reference: if applicant says they paid \$1,500/month, ask the 'landlord' the same question independently
- Ask questions only a real landlord would know: "What was the security deposit refund amount?"
- Always call past landlords, not just the current one — current landlords have an incentive to lie to get rid of bad tenants
- If something feels off, it usually is — slow the process, ask for more documentation

# Income & Employment Fraud


- Paystub red flags: round numbers, inconsistent fonts, math that doesn't reconcile YTD-to-current
- Don't trust the employer phone number on the application — Google the employer independently
- Verify with HR or payroll, not the applicant's manager (managers can be friends)
- Cross-check: net income on stub vs. bank deposits on statements — should roughly match
- Use a service like The Work Number, Plaid, or direct bank-link verification when possible
- Self-employed: 2 years tax returns + 3 months of recent bank statements — not just "a letter from my CPA"

# Identity & Credit Fraud

- Synthetic identity: real SSN + made-up name and history — passes basic credit checks
- Match the photo ID to a live person — video tour or in-person showing helps
- Run credit + criminal + eviction as a UNIFIED report (TransUnion SmartMove, RentPrep, Experian RentBureau)
- \*Cross-check address history on credit report vs. addresses listed on application
- If credit history seems too thin or too clean for someone's age, ask follow-up questions
- Approach out of out-of-state applicants with extra caution — fraud favors distance

# A real life example...

Jan 20, 2026      \$1,800      Mar 13, 2026 [Edit](#)      Doss & Spaulding


  
**Recommended approval**

[Explain recommendation](#)


Group metrics  Include guarantors

Gross income <b>\$6,522.20</b> <small>Verified</small>	Gross income to rent <b>3.62x</b> <small>Verified</small>	Debt to gross income <b>79.36%</b> <small>Verified</small>	Debt to net income <b>106.28%</b> <small>Verified</small>	Net income <b>\$4,870.33</b> <small>Verified</small>	Highest credit score <b>782</b>
Gross income <b>\$6,586.67</b> <small>Self-reported</small>	Gross income to rent <b>3.66x</b> <small>Self-reported</small>	Debt to gross income <b>78.58%</b> <small>Self-reported</small>	People with no credit score <b>0</b>	Average credit score <b>782</b>	Lowest credit score <b>782</b>

[Applicants \(1\)](#)

**Taylor**  ...


Primary applicant    Self-serve application

[Review](#) 

Application status: **Submitted**

Started: Mar 13, 2026 at 3:26 PM

Records match verification ? **Passed**

Name: Taylor  **Match**



Date of birth: Jan 14, 1994 **Match**

Phone number: +1 (475) 900-8573 **No match**


# A real life example...

## Verification method

 **GitLab**  
Paystub Re-verify with documents

Document	Date range	Gross pay	Net pay	Status
 CHECHSTUBRE...	Feb 16, 2026 - Mar 1, 2026	\$2,964	\$2,217.61	Verified 



 **Authenticity score 90/100:** We did not find evidence of tampering / fraud this document

## Paystub details

Pay period	Feb 16, 2026 - Mar 1, 2026
Pay date	Mar 6, 2026
Net pay	\$2,217.61
Gross pay	\$2,964
Provider	-
Frequency	NOT LISTED

## Credit report

 Re-run report

Print report

### Credit report summary

Report was successfully completed on Mar 15, 2026, at 6:02 PM  
Report ID: 3372337

**EQUIFAX**

Credit score

**782**

Past due accounts

**0%**

Balance past due

**\$0**

Balance of collections

**\$0**

Bankruptcy

**0**

Accounts in foreclosure

**0**


# A real life example...

**Criminal report** Report date: Mar 15, 2026 at 6:02 PM [Request county search](#) [Print report](#)

Summary

Felony <b>0 convictions</b> 0 offenses	Misdemeanor <b>0 convictions</b> 0 offenses	Other criminal <b>0 convictions</b> 0 offenses
National sex offender <b>0 convictions</b>	OFAC <b>0 convictions</b>	

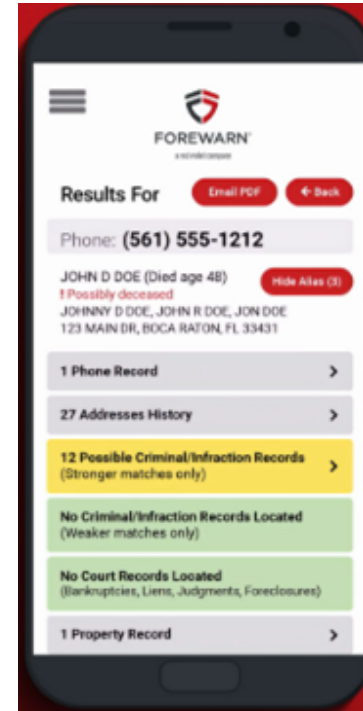
National

 CLEAR

**National criminal records search**

Requested	Requested by	Completed
Mar 15, 2026 at 6:02 PM	Automatically	Mar 15, 2026 at 6:02 PM

No records found





# Putting It All Together

# The Tenant Screening Checklist

1. Written criteria published with the listing — same for everyone
2. Standard application + signed authorizations from every adult occupant
3. Independent verification: employer (you find the number), prior landlord, ID match
4. Unified credit + background + eviction report from a reputable provider
5. Income proof beyond pay stubs (bank deposits, Plaid, tax returns if self-employed)
6. Fair housing review: did I treat this applicant exactly like the last one?
7. Document the decision in the file — including reasons for denial

# Documentation — What to Keep

- Every application — accepted AND denied (denials are where complaints come from)
- Screening reports, verification call notes, ID copies
- Adverse Action Notice for denied applicants based on credit (FCRA requirement)
- Written reasoning for any denial — what criteria they failed
- Communications with applicants — texts, emails, voicemails
- Retention: NC has no specific rule, but 4 years for accepted, 4-7 years for denied is a safe floor
- Store securely — these files contain SSNs and protected info



What's one screening habit you're going to start,  
stop, or improve?



# Key Takeaways

- Write your criteria down — apply them to every applicant, no exceptions
- Fair housing isn't about intent — it's about effect; consistency is your shield
- Assistance animals aren't pets — never charge a pet fee, never deny without engaging
- Verify income, identity, and references through INDEPENDENT channels
- Document everything — the file is what saves you when a complaint comes
- When in doubt: slow down. The cost of a week of vacancy is much less than a bad tenant

# Thank you!

*Doss & Spaulding Properties LLC*