

## INTRODUCTION

This page will cover finding general tips on how to find sex offender housing as well as provide info on specific programs that assist in housing or halfway houses. This page does not address the legalities of residency and housing issues; those issues are covered in other parts of the Once Fallen website.

Housing and employment are the two most common questions I receive. I won't lie to you – housing is difficult to find even under the best of circumstances. It may be helpful to share my personal experiences with finding housing to give you an understanding of the difficulties you may face while seeking housing.

At the time I was incarcerated, Alabama's law stipulated that anyone failing to obtain a legal residence upon their release date were to be charged for FTR. Over the course of a year, I had written about 70 transitional housing programs, mostly to no avail. I found a program in SW Ohio five days before my 2003 release date and went from Alabama to Ohio with help from the Catholic Church. I stayed in a heavily-religious program for almost a full year, but ended up staying in homeless shelters or slept on the street for about 5 months. I had obtained a job and found a sleeping room for \$150/ mo. in 2004 (amazingly the first place I called). Two years later, the state determined the apartment was too close to a GED school (Ohio has a 1000 foot residency restriction law), and I called 131 apartments over a period of seven months before I stumbled upon an apartment complex during an afternoon walk. Fortunately, the landlord had a son on the registry. I lived in that apartment and took in a non-registrant roommate.

I moved back to Alabama in 2009; my girlfriend lived near the apartment complex where I lived and had a reputation as a "SO House." But when my mother passed away and I split with my girlfriend, I returned to Ohio as my roommate never replaced me so my old room was available. In 2014, the apartment building was sold to and the entire block was gentrified; I had to find a new apartment. Thankfully, in 2011, the Ohio Supreme Court determined that residency restrictions were punitive and cannot be applied to anyone convicted before July 31, 2003. I no longer had to abide by the 1000 foot rule. It only took 4 weeks and 34 calls to find three apartments. In 2019, that apartment burned; as of 2020, I'm staying in the home of a fellow activist.

In short, I've experienced my own share of housing struggles. Housing has gotten more expensive since the housing bubble burst in 2008, leading to the "great recession." It also led to more people seeking to rent rather than own. Most of you reading this looking to get out of prison will most likely need a transitional program; specific housing leads will be listed by state below.

The bad news is housing options are very limited especially in areas with strict residency restriction laws. Even in areas not enforcing residency restrictions, few people are willing to rent to those on the registries, as noted in my own study on obtaining housing in 2006. At least 30 states have some form of residency, proximity, and even work restriction law in place, and they are starting to

increase with popularity after years without new restrictions. Also note that those required to register for life are barred from obtaining Section 8 Housing (in addition to state laws that may exclude non-lifetime registrants from public housing; I cover Section 8 Housing on the OnceFallen FAQ page).

## HOUSE HUNTING TIPS AND THINGS TO REMEMBER

The good news is that there are ways to find housing. I just won't lie to you and pretend it is a cakewalk. Below are a few general tips on finding housing.

### TIP #1: TALK TO THE REGISTRY OFFICE - BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

Check with the local registration office before you even start looking for a home especially if you are moving to a new community, because sometimes cities, townships, or counties have residency laws that differ from the laws imposed by the state. A five minute call may save you a lot more headache during your house hunt later.

### TIP #2: FINDING HOUSING LEADS

In the years since I began seeking housing lists, agencies that interact with registered citizens have increased awareness of the special challenges of finding housing for registered citizens and are starting to make note of programs for registrants. Here are a few places you might be able to find local housing leads:

Local charities: Churches, community action agencies, homeless shelters or coalitions, and even food banks often have housing lists for low-income agencies, and some may list housing specific to registrants. Law Enforcement/ Registry offices: Sometimes, local registry offices may have a lead or two. Your state's Dept. of Corrections website may have a list of programs. Many of the lists on the DoC sites are online. Georgia's list is "THOR", for example.) The Internet: If you do a search "sex offender housing [your city]," you might find some lists. Many renters post on Craigslist.org because it is free and Craigslist can show rentals on a map. Since no one is going to advertise that they rent to Registered Persons (though some will definitely state "No SOs), I suggest is maintaining a list of phone numbers of everyone you called. Some renters own numerous properties so a list will keep you from wasting your time with repeat rejections from the same renter.

### TIP #3: USING THE REGISTRY TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

It seems ironic to suggest visiting a public registry website, but websites that have mapping software like Family Watchdog may assist you by showing where registered citizens live in a community. These silly maps with the red dots may help give you an idea where to focus your search, especially in an urban environment. You could then use the Craigslist.org housing listings map to find housing.

### TIP #4: DON'T GET DISCOURAGED

Finding a place to live is like finding a needle in a haystack, so expect a lot of rejection, especially in places with residence restrictions. There are people willing to rent to you out there, but finding them is a tedious process. If you can't handle the rejection yourself, pay someone you know a few bucks to call them. You have to grow thick skin because some folks won't be cordial while rejecting you.

#### TIP #4: HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

I can't stress the importance honesty enough. It is better to be up-front about asking if prospective landlords rent to registered citizens than to lie to get in only to be evicted later. Many places have eviction lists that will add to difficulties in finding housing in the future. Even if you're one of the lucky ones that aren't listed publicly, background checks and private registry lists are out there so your registry status will come out eventually.

If you do contact someone and you have the opportunity to "sell yourself" in the way you would while job hunting, be prepared to do so. As a whole, registered citizens are more likely to keep to themselves, pay 9rent on time, and complain less than other tenants.

Landlords these days may also do credit checks and eviction checks. You may be expected to pay an application fee. Be prepared to deal with that and if there is a fee involved, get confirmation that you would be given serious consideration before fronting the money.

#### TIP #5: C-Y-A

If you find a place, consider yourself lucky or blessed. However, it is important to remember wherever you find yourself, remember there can be complications even after you've settled in. It should be a no-brainer, but be sure to register with the Sheriff's office ASAP; don't delay, as many areas have short registration periods. If you're moving to a new county or a new state, you'll have to register both with the area you are leaving AND the area you are moving to. Many FTRs came about because someone assumed that he only had to register in location B, forgetting location A, and just figured Registry Office B would notify Registry Office A. Registry office A eventually notices you didn't check in on time, goes to your old house, you aren't there, a warrant id put out for your arrest for FTR, and your life is ruined.

#### TIP #6: INSURANCE/ PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

I hate to say this, but experience shows that renters willing to rent to you are likely not highly concerned about his property or the quality of his tenants. If your search is in an urban area, you are more likely to find residence with higher crime and lower standard of living. (In 17 years since my release, I've experienced multiple break-ins and one house fire). Thus, I suggest getting Renter's Insurance; most Insurance companies offer Renter's Insurance for around \$15 a month, and it will cover you in case of theft, fire, or other problems. However, even if you are staying in the Bates Motel, be sure to take good care of your property. Building a good rapport with the landlord will help you as you often need good references for a new lease.

Because of the constantly changing nature of residence restriction laws, I suggest keeping about three month's rent in a savings account. Even if you are on disability, keep about \$1200 to \$1500 in your savings account at all times (Rules of Social Security Disability/ SSI allows you to keep up to \$2000 in savings without penalty. This applies to those on SSI, the rules to those drawing from the lifetime earnings fall under different rules. You can contact Social Security for specific rules on property and savings issues). I'd also strongly suggest you improve your credit rating. There are many ways to do that (there are other books on that), but having a good credit score helps should you need to move in the future.

#### TIP #7: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

The bad news is discrimination laws do not apply to discrimination based on criminal accusations/ convictions. However, just because you are on a registry does not mean that law enforcement can come in and check your residence during "compliance/ address verification checks" without a warrant, unless you are on supervised release/ probation/ parole. That being said, "No police agency or even the US Marshals can come into any residence without a warrant, if a person is off of supervision. The only time they can is, if it is an emergency (fire, or other such emergency) or they hear someone being hurt." I will cover this in greater detail on the OnceFallen Police/ Compliance Checks Page.

#### TIP #8: MOVING TO ANOTHER STATE/ COUNTRY

Moving to another state is a greater hassle than moving across town. Because cities, counties, and states have differing laws, the best way to find out what laws are applicable in your area is to contact the Sheriff's office in the county you want to move to. You may have to fill out a "notice of intent to move/ reside" form. Another major problem is states register offenders differently. You may live in a state that gives you a "Tier 1/ Low Risk" designation with 10 year registration in one state, while another state gives lifetime registration or may reclassify you a Tier 3/ High Risk" because of the circumstances of your crime. Once you are raised in Tier levels, it is nearly impossible to lower your tier level. Also, some states do not simply restrict where you live, but restrict who you live with, which is especially important if you are planning on moving to a residence where a minor resides. This applies to any registrant, not always ones with child victims.