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Mass Legal Help QnA

The project can be found at the link below:

Security Deposit QnA: https://gabriele1993.github.io/ctl_final/deposit.html

Housing Code Checklist QnA: https://gabriele1993.github.io/ctl_final/housingchecklist.html

The text of the QnA can be found at the link below:

Security Deposit QnA:

https://github.com/Gabriele1993/ctl_final/blob/master/qnadeposit.txt

Housing Code Checklist QnA:

https://github.com/Gabriele1993/ctl_final/blob/master/QnAhousingchecklist.txt

This project is for Masslegalhelp (<https://www.masslegalhelp.org>), which is a Massachusetts legal aid program that puts together and promotes the spread of practical information about legal rights in Massachusetts. MassLegalHelp works in a variety of areas, from Immigration to Income benefits. The project I worked on specifically deals with Housing issues (property law). I worked on two projects in particular, a Security Deposit letter and the Housing Code Checklist (generally for eviction cases).

USERS:

The Identified users for this project is the public at large. Hopefully, the Qnas will help many individuals, from the high and middle class to the lower class, by easing access to legal information that is not readily available to them through the use of technology.

RESEARCH:

Research was needed for this project, as some of the information in the documents was not self-explanatory, especially for the housing code checklist. Several relevant sanitary code violations were researched for this project.

PROBLEM SOLVING & FRAMING:

A problem I tried to solve, was to decrease the time it takes to read and fill in a document by instead making it automated and creating the document with conditional logic through the use of the QnA (Qnamarkup.com) technology. A problem I faced was in the Housing Checklist, the document is 16 pages long, it was hard to synthesize and create logic that would flow without removing too much information that is needed for the users to give an educated answer. The mail-merge process was also a problem I faced, which luckily through repetition and hard work I was able to solve. Unfortunately, the csv file kept opening with the “numbers” app rather than excel, which created “parsing” issues. Additionally, the mail-merge also gave me problems when I used a merge field/tag that had a number, so I changed that and made sure no merge fields that I used on my word document had numbers. Among other problems I encountered, one worth noting was the problem I faced when I did not realize that the mail-merge and QnA take into

consideration whether the file is a doc or docx, as for it to work I had to change the format to docx, and allow my system preferences security settings to open the file.

SUSTAINABILITY:

This QnA is built with the intention of it working for years to come on the masslegalhelp website. It will be soon open to the public. Hosting is provided by the association and will be managed by them as well.

DISCLAIMER:

The QnA includes a disclaimer, which hopefully will keep potential lawsuits away.

TESTING:

The Identified detailed user personas for testing were: a representative employee of MassLegalHelp, myself, and other students who generously gave their time to attempt to improve the logic of the Qnas. Below you can find the feedback, opinions and suggestions that were kindly provided by MassLegalHelp:

They mostly revolve around language. We try to make the site readable at a 5th grade reading level. Part of readability is making the questions in the positive form. *I think* the logic still works and will not need to be changed if we just rephrase several of these questions in the positive instead of the negative. Again Gabrielle, you did an incredible amount of work getting this logic and flow working and generating two great documents. It is just a interview language issue we may want to alter a bit later. Thank you!!!!!!!

Security Deposit Letter

- Q1: (Are you a tenant who is looking to have your security deposit returned from your landlord?) maybe break into 2 questions or just rephrase actively- "Do you want to ask for your security deposit back from your landlord?"
- Q2: (Did your landlord not put your money in a bank account that is separate, which is protected from creditors and separate from your money?) Can be broken into two questions. Also maybe give people an "I don't know" option?
- Q3: Did your landlord give you a receipt within 30 days of receiving your security deposit? (With the amount of the security deposit, the name and address of the bank where it is being held, and the bank account number) I'd again break this into two questions, with the part in the parenthesis as a "Did the receipt list ALL of the following information..." People will not know what to do if it only lists one thing, or 2 things etc.
- Q4: Did your landlord not allow you to inspect the security deposit records? Reading negatives is hard for people. Maybe "Did you try to inspect the security deposit records" then "Did the landlord say no or stop you?"
- Q6: I know the form document just lists "new owner" but it seems out of context in the interview. I think we have to give a little more information, like, did your landlord sell your building to a new owner? Then, ask if the new owner followed the law- we will also need an "i dont know" option here.
- Excellent job with the 'catch all' questions at the end- in case people mess up to make sure they can generate a document. But it is a little confusing having the "except" phrase in there. Did you answer "no" to all the questions? (except the first one) Maybe find a way to re-write it so the answer to the first one can be no too? Or instead of the bubble you click just saying "Yes" to each question we could say "Yes. You may have a security deposit claim." so then at the end we can ask.
- Generated Document-- Maybe in the next phase of this we can ask for the tenant and landlord's name and address and insert them in the heading and into the signature line.

Housing Checklist

This is a lot of questions you did a great job in making them concise.

- Q1: If you hit "no" there is an error-- it produces many yes/nos
- Q1: do you have to be in an eviction to use this? I thought it would be helpful even if not in court proceedings.
- I like how you provide the law with the questions
- Q: **Is there no electricity or gas?** can we rephrase this in the positive?
- Q: **Is there a shut-off and/or failure to restore electricity, gas, or water?** Is this "Did the landlord shut off your electricity, gas or water?"
- Q: **Are there any Inadequate exits, including the obstruction of any exit, passageway, or common area through which you exit in an emergency?** How about 2 questions: Do you have 2 exits from your unit? and Are any of the exits, passageways or common areas blocked?
- Q: **Are there no or inadequate locks for entry doors for either the apartment or the building?** Positive- Are there working locks on both the door to your apartment and the building?
- Q: **Is there any Lead paint that a child under age 6 could reach?** So people may not know- maybe, "Do you know of any lead paint...."
- Q: **Is there no or not enough hot or cold water (including amount, pressure, and temperature) for 24 hours or longer?** Have you ever gone 24 or more without enough hot or cold water? (including amount, pressure and temperature)
- Q: **Is there no smoke detector or carbon monoxide alarm in good working order?** positive- Do you have a smoke detector and a carbon monoxide
- Q: **Are there any defects in building materials that may lead to release of asbestos dust?** Do you know of any asbestos in the building?
- Q: **Are there any other violations of the Sanitary Code the inspector finds dangerous to health and safety?** Maybe move this question to the end.
- Q: **Is the kitchen sink is too small, or sink, stove, or oven is not in good working condition?** positive-- Are the sink, stove and oven in good working condition and the sink big enough?
- Q: **Is the sink, tub, or shower in the bathroom not in good working condition?** positive Are teh sink tub and shower in the bathroom in good working condition?
- Q: **Is there no or unsafe handrails or protective railings on porches, roofs, stairways, or other similar places?** Positive- Are any porches, roofs, stairways or similar places missing or have unsafe handrails?
- Q: **Is there any defect in electrical, plumbing, or heating system that violates "generally accepted standards" but does not create an immediate hazard?** Probably have to explain what this is a little more.
- Q: **Is a safety issue involved?** May have to elaborate
- Q: **Is there a space issue?** I do not know what this means
- Q: **If the building has 3 or more units, does the landlord not provide enough watertight garbage cans? - (Cans must have tightly fitting covers. The landlord must put cans in places that are convenient to tenants and do not allow odors into your living space.)** make positive
- Lead paint Q is asked 3 x and rodent Q is asked twice-- probably find a way to only ask once and use for (I am assuming) the multiple places it comes up on the form.

REFINEMENT:

The user feedback (above) was seriously considered and used to improve the final version of the product. Additionally, improvements and suggestions were implemented in the latest version in a uniform manner, therefore the final version is not the same as the original version. Also among the changes, more legal explanations were added and paraphrased so the users could better understand the content.

INTRO PITCH:

The pitch provided a basic outline and explanation of the project, since then the QnA project has much improved.

DOCUMENTATION:

The product was written while keeping in mind that it should be accessible to most users. This means using simple and easy to read language. In fact, this is especially useful for people who do not speak English as their first language.

REAL WORLD VIABILITY:

The product is almost ready for real-world use. The only step that is missing is a secure connection for the transfer of information (especially as some of the forms contain personal and private facts, which a user would likely not want out on the world wide web)

OVERALL:

Overall, I think a stable and adequate product was produced. The QnA's shall hopefully help save time and assist many people with their Housing related issues through the use of technology for years to come.