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## Tenant negotiates a smaller rent increase

Shireen Gonzaga was not at all happy when she discovered – at lease renewal time – that the rent for her apartment just north of Baltimore was going up \$100 a month. In 21 years in the neighborhood, she'd never seen a rent increase of more than \$25.

Renters, take note: She fought back with facts. And won a major concession.

Gonzaga went on Rent.com and looked up the rates – regular rates, not move-in specials – for nice rentals near her. Here's what she pointed out to her apartment manager:

**Somerset at Towson**, she wrote, is advertising 1,170-square-foot apartments for \$1,140 and 1,280-square-foot apartments for \$1,170, plus it has a pool, playground and extra storage units. **Versailles in Towson** has 1,300-square-foot apartments for \$1,312 to \$1,556, plus a pool, fitness center and clubhouse.

She threw in a few more examples, and then noted that her complex has units under 1,000 square feet advertised at \$1,250 to \$1,375. Amenity: playground. Maybe.

"I've not seen a playground on the property," she noted in an email to the property manager.

Considering the competition, she wrote, "it's very hard to understand the market rate of \$1375 for my apartment."

"Please let me know if my assessment of your market rates are incorrect, and if so, please explain to me how you arrived at the \$1375 value," she added in her note. "Otherwise, I hope you will rethink the way you determine market values, and offer more realistic rental rates to your tenants (assuming you want to keep them)."

Result: The property manager offered her a 12-month lease at \$25 more a month rather than \$100 more.

Recounting this to me, Gonzaga said: "I wonder how many other tenants are aware that the so-called market rate is grossly inflated?"

Odds are, some renters are getting good deals and some aren't. It doesn't hurt to research – like Gonzaga did – to see if you have room to open negotiations.

"This experience has been quite an eye-opener for me," she said.