



An Extended Guide · No. 1859

Cameras for a Small Hotel or Rental Property — Common Areas, Guests & the Law

Where cameras belong, what to disclose, and what must stay private

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

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! Read this first — it's about people, not just pictures

Before the gear, a word that matters more than any camera: with a business you are recording other people — customers, staff, people walking by — so where you point a camera, and whether it picks up sound, is as important as the picture. As a rule, keep cameras on general work and public areas, never on restrooms, changing areas, or anywhere someone expects privacy, and be very careful about recording audio. This guide gives you plain-English general information, not legal advice. For your own situation — especially anything to do with employees, audio, or the law — check with an attorney who knows Ohio. With a hotel or a rental you are recording your guests, so the line between a sensible security camera and an illegal one is drawn very clearly — and the booking platforms draw it even tighter than the law does.

Cameras that protect the place without crossing a line

A few well-placed cameras can make a small hotel or a rental property far safer — watching the entrances, the lot, and the common areas for everyone's sake. But point one at the wrong spot and you have gone from sensible security to a serious legal problem. This guide keeps you on the right side of that line.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. For 30-plus years I've helped folks get comfortable with their technology, patiently and in plain language. Hospitality is a special case: your guests are paying to feel at home, so a camera in the wrong place is not just against the rules — it breaks the trust your business runs on.

I'll keep this simple. We'll cover where a camera belongs, what you have to tell people, and the handful of places a camera must never go. One thing up front: this is general information to help you plan, not legal advice — I'm a tech helper, not a lawyer.

★ When in doubt, leave the camera out

If you are ever unsure whether a spot is fair game, the safe answer is almost always no. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll walk your property together — free, with nothing to sell you — and I'll help you check the current platform rules too.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you'll keep your cameras safe, legal, and fair to your guests.

- ❑ Never put a camera in a guest room, a bathroom, or a changing area — not ever, not even turned off. In Ohio that can be a crime.
- ❑ Common and public areas — lobby, hallways, entrances, parking, the pool deck, the outside of the building — are generally fine WITH clear notice to guests.
- ❑ Booking platforms are stricter than the law: Airbnb has banned ALL indoor cameras in listings; Vrbo does not allow surveillance inside.
- ❑ Outdoor cameras on a rental must be disclosed before booking, kept away from private areas, and never aimed at indoor spaces.
- ❑ Disclose everything, plainly — in the listing, in the house rules, and with a sign at the door.
- ❑ Platform rules change. Check the current policy before you mount anything, and when in doubt, ask a pro.

✓ One rule to hold onto

A guest has a reasonable expectation of privacy wherever they sleep, bathe, or change. Cameras stay out of those places, full stop — and everywhere else, a guest should never be surprised to learn a camera was there.

The one rule that is never negotiable

Before anything else, learn the places a camera must never go. Everything else in this guide is details; this is the part that can land you in real trouble.

Guest sleeping rooms, bathrooms, and changing areas are off limits, period. These are places where a person has what the law calls a reasonable expectation of privacy. Secretly recording someone there isn't just a policy violation — under Ohio's voyeurism law it can be a crime.

This holds no matter how good your reason feels. Not to catch a guest damaging a room, not to settle a dispute, not 'just the corner by the door'. If a camera can see into a space where people undress, sleep, or use the toilet, it does not belong there. There is no version of this that is okay.

- **Guest rooms** — the whole room, including any view through a doorway from a hall camera.
- **Bathrooms** — and the approach, if the camera can see inside when the door opens.
- **Changing areas** — pool and spa changing rooms, anywhere people undress.

! Why this one is so serious

Ohio's voyeurism law (Revised Code 2907.08) and a person's general right to privacy mean cameras must never be placed where someone reasonably expects privacy — guest rooms, bathrooms, and changing areas. Secretly recording in those places can be a crime, not just a lawsuit. This is general information, not legal advice; rules change and every situation is different, so confirm the specifics with an attorney who knows Ohio before you rely on it.

Where a camera is welcome

The good news: the spots where cameras do the most good are exactly the spots where they're generally allowed — the shared, public parts of the property.

Common and public areas of a lodging are generally fair game, as long as you give clear notice. These are the places that protect everyone: the ways in and out, the shared spaces, and the grounds. A camera here settles disputes and deters trouble without ever pointing at someone's private moment.

- The lobby and the front desk.
- Hallways and shared corridors.
- Entrances and exits — every outside door.
- The parking lot and the approach to the building.
- The pool deck and other shared outdoor areas.
- The exterior and grounds of the building.

Notice the pattern: these are all places a guest passes through in full view of others, not places they retreat to for privacy. If you keep cameras on the shared and the outside, and off the private, you've already got the hard part right. Our planning guide walks through choosing the exact spots.

✓ Watch the doorways, not through them

A hallway camera is fine — until it can see into a room every time a door opens. When you aim a common-area camera, stand where it stands and open the nearby doors. If it peeks inside a room or bath, move it.

Tell people they're on camera

In common areas, the magic word is notice. A camera a guest knows about is sensible security; a hidden one is a problem waiting to happen.

Disclosure does two jobs at once. It keeps you on the right side of the rules, and it reassures honest guests while it deters the dishonest ones. A guest should be able to learn, before and during their stay, that there are cameras and roughly where they are.

For a rental especially, 'before booking' matters — a guest should know about any cameras when they decide to book, not discover one on arrival. Put it in the listing, repeat it in the house rules, and post a plain sign at the entrance. Three mentions is not too many.

Where your disclosure should live

- In the listing or booking page, before a guest commits.
- In the house rules or welcome book inside the property.
- On a clear sign at the entrance and in common areas.

★ I'll help you word the notice

A good camera notice is short, plain, and honest — it says cameras are present and roughly where, without reading like a legal threat. Our guide on employees and notices goes deeper, and I'm glad to help you word yours. Call (330) 200-8042.

The booking platforms go further than the law

If you list on Airbnb or Vrbo, their rules — not just Ohio law — decide what you can do. And their rules are stricter.

Here's the part that surprises a lot of hosts: even where the law would allow a camera in a common area with notice, the platform may ban it outright. When you accept a platform's terms, you agree to play by its rules, and those rules have tightened a great deal.

Airbnb

Airbnb has banned ALL indoor security cameras in listings worldwide, effective April 30, 2024 — even if the device is turned off or disconnected. Outdoor cameras are allowed only if you disclose them (their presence and general location) before booking, keep them away from areas with a greater expectation of privacy, and never point them at indoor spaces.

Vrbo

Vrbo does not allow surveillance devices inside a property. Smart devices are allowed only if guests are informed and can deactivate them during their stay.

! What this means for a rental host

A short-term-rental host on these platforms may be allowed NO indoor cameras at all, and must disclose any outdoor ones before booking. Platform policies change often, so always check the current policy on the platform itself before you install or keep any camera. This is general information, not legal advice; rules change and every situation is different, so confirm the specifics with an attorney who knows Ohio before you rely on it.

Two kinds of businesses, two sets of needs

A small hotel and a short-term-rental host face the same law but very different rules. Which one you are changes what you're allowed to do.

If you run a small hotel, motel, or B&B

You're not bound by Airbnb or Vrbo rules, so you have more room — but Ohio law still governs you. You can use cameras in common areas with notice, and never in guest rooms or bathrooms.

- Cover the lobby, front desk, hallways, entrances, and parking.
- Post clear notice at the entrance and in common areas.
- Keep every camera off guest-room and bathroom views, including through open doors.
- Mind audio and staff privacy, and limit who can watch the footage.

If you host on Airbnb, Vrbo, or similar

The platform's rules bind you on top of the law, and they're strict: likely NO indoor cameras at all. Your job is to disclose any outdoor cameras and keep the inside camera-free.

- Assume no indoor cameras — Airbnb bans them even when switched off.
- Disclose outdoor cameras and their general location before booking.
- Never aim an outdoor camera at an indoor space or a private area.
- Re-check the current platform policy before every season — it changes.

★ Not sure which rules apply to you?

Plenty of places are a mix — a small inn that also lists a cottage on Airbnb, say. Tell me how you rent and on what platforms, and I'll help you sort out which rules cover which building. Call (330) 200-8042.

The outside of the property

Outdoor cameras are where most hosts and small hotels get the most value, and they're allowed in more cases — but they still come with strings.

A camera watching the driveway, the entrance, or the parking area protects guests and property alike, and deters the trouble that tends to start outside. For a rental host, an outdoor camera is often the only one the platform will allow at all.

The strings are simple but firm: disclose it before booking, keep it away from areas with a greater expectation of privacy, and never let it see indoors. A doorbell camera at the front door is a classic example — fine if it watches the approach, a problem if it peers through a window or into an entryway where guests gather privately.

- Good spots: driveway, front and back doors, parking, the yard approach.
- Disclose the presence and general location before a guest books.
- Angle it down and outward so no window or interior is in frame.
- Keep it off a neighbor's property and off any private outdoor nook.

! An outdoor camera can still see too much

A camera mounted outside is not automatically fine. If it can see through a window, into a doorway, or onto a private patio where guests relax, it's crossing the same line as an indoor one. Aim it, then go check what it actually sees.

If you host on Airbnb or Vrbo

Short-term-rental hosts have the tightest rules, so here's a plain checklist to keep you clear.

- ☐ I have NO cameras inside the property — none, not even unplugged ones.
- ☐ I've removed or disabled any indoor device that could record, and said so if a smart device remains.
- ☐ My outdoor cameras are disclosed in the listing, before booking.
- ☐ I've described where the outdoor cameras are, in general terms.
- ☐ No outdoor camera can see indoors, into a window, or onto a private patio.
- ☐ I've read the platform's current camera policy this season.

If a smart device like a video doorbell or an indoor assistant stays in the home, treat it the way the platform tells you to — Vrbo, for instance, allows smart devices only if guests are informed and can turn them off. The safest path for an indoor device is to remove it.

✓ Unplugged is not the same as removed

Airbnb's indoor ban applies even to a camera that's switched off or unplugged. If an indoor camera exists in the space at all, it's a problem. Take it down, don't just turn it off.

If you run a small hotel, motel, or B&B

Not listing on a short-term-rental platform gives you more room to work — but Ohio law is still the boss, and good sense fills in the rest.

You can run cameras in your common areas with notice: the lobby and front desk, the hallways, the entrances, the parking lot, and the grounds. That covers most of what a lodging needs to protect itself and its guests without ever touching a private space.

The rooms and bathrooms stay camera-free, always. And think about the in-between spots: a camera at the end of a hallway shouldn't be able to see into a room when the door opens, and a pool camera shouldn't take in the changing area. Our planning guide helps you map this room by room.

- Front desk and lobby — for disputes, theft, and after-hours safety.
- Hallways — but angled so open doors don't reveal room interiors.
- Every outside entrance and the parking lot.
- Back-of-house: storerooms, the office, service doors.

★ Let's walk your floors together

A small hotel has a lot of corners, and the tricky ones are always the in-between spots. I'll walk the property with you and help you place every camera where it protects guests without ever seeing a private moment. Call (330) 200-8042.

Be very careful about recording sound

Cameras capture pictures; many can capture sound too. Sound carries its own rules, and in a lodging it's a place to tread lightly.

Recording audio is governed separately from video, and it's easy to trip over without meaning to. Most lodgings leave microphones off for good reason — a camera that happens to pick up a private conversation in a hallway or lobby raises questions a silent one never does.

If your cameras can record sound, the simplest safe step is usually to turn the audio off unless you have a clear reason and have checked the rules. We give audio its own guide, because the details matter and they're specific to Ohio.

! Audio is its own set of rules

Recording sound is treated separately from recording video, and the rules are specific. Unless you've checked and have a clear reason, the safe default in a lodging is to leave microphones off. See our guide on audio recording in Ohio for the details. This is general information, not legal advice; rules change and every situation is different, so confirm the specifics with an attorney who knows Ohio before you rely on it.

Where the footage lives and who can watch it

Having cameras in the right places is half the job. Handling what they record responsibly is the other half.

Your guests trust you with footage of themselves coming and going. Treat it the way you'd want a hotel to treat video of you: keep it secure, limit who can view it to the people who truly need to, and don't keep it longer than you have a reason to.

That means a sensible password on the system, access only for you and the staff who need it, and a clear idea of how many days you keep before footage is overwritten. Our guides on passwords and updates, and on viewing from your phone safely, walk through doing this without leaving a door open for strangers.

! A camera system you can watch, others can watch too

Remote viewing is wonderful — and it's exactly how a stranger gets in if it's set up carelessly. For a property full of paying guests, set up remote access the safe way, never by opening ports on the router. We cover it in the phone-viewing guide.

Keep honest guests comfortable

The best camera setup protects the property and still lets a guest feel at ease. Those two goals pull together more than they pull apart.

A guest who sees a plain sign at the entrance and a line in the house rules understands you're running a careful place. A guest who stumbles on a camera they weren't told about feels spied on — and tells everyone. Disclosure isn't just a rule; it's good hospitality.

Keep the cameras obviously pointed at the shared and the outside, never anywhere that even looks like it might see a private moment. When the purpose of every camera is plain — the door, the lot, the lobby — guests read it as security, not snooping.

✓ Visible and disclosed beats hidden every time

There's rarely a good reason to hide a camera in a lodging. A camera you can see, in a spot that obviously watches a shared area, does more to deter trouble and reassure guests than a hidden one ever could — and it keeps you clear of the rules.

Signs, listings, and house rules

Your disclosure only works if people actually see it. A little care in wording and placement goes a long way.

Keep the message plain and honest: say that cameras are present, say roughly where (entrances, parking, common areas), and make clear there are none in private spaces. A guest should come away reassured, not alarmed.

Put the same message in three places so no one can miss it: the listing or booking page before a guest commits, the house rules or welcome book inside, and a sign at the entrance. For a rental, the before-booking mention is the one the platforms care about most.

- Name the general areas cameras cover — don't make a guest guess.
- State plainly that there are no cameras in rooms or bathrooms.
- Use plain language, not legal threats — you want reassurance.
- Keep a dated copy of what you disclosed and where.

★ A second set of eyes on your wording

If you send me your listing text and a photo of your entrance sign, I'll read them the way a guest would and flag anything that's unclear or missing. It's the kind of small thing that prevents a big complaint. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common mistakes people make

Most camera trouble at a lodging comes from the same short list of avoidable slip-ups. Now you'll know them before they bite.

- **A camera that sees into a room** — a hallway or doorbell camera that catches the interior when a door opens.
- **An indoor camera on a platform listing** — banned on Airbnb even if it's unplugged.
- **No disclosure, or disclosure only after arrival** — for rentals it needs to come before booking.
- **An outdoor camera aimed through a window** or onto a private patio.
- **Recording audio** without checking the separate rules first.
- **Assuming last year's platform policy still holds** — they change.

! The mistake that becomes a crime

Most of these cost you a bad review or a platform warning. One does not: a camera that can see into a room, bathroom, or changing area. Under Ohio's voyeurism law that can be criminal. Check every camera's actual view, not just its label.

Questions to ask before you mount anything

Whether you're talking to an installer, a platform, or to me, these questions keep you out of trouble.

Q: Can this camera see into any room, bathroom, or changing area?

The only safe answer is a flat no — including through a door when it opens, or a window from outside. If there's any doubt, move the camera or change its angle until there isn't.

Q: Does my booking platform allow this camera at all?

For indoor cameras on Airbnb or Vrbo, the answer is generally no. For outdoor ones, only with disclosure. Check the platform's current policy yourself — don't rely on what was true last year.

Q: Have I disclosed every camera, before booking and on site?

You want it in the listing, the house rules, and on a sign. For a rental, the before-booking mention is the one that matters most to the platform.

Q: Is the footage secure, and is audio off unless I've checked?

Lock the system with a real password, limit who can view it, and leave microphones off unless you've confirmed the separate audio rules.

✓ If a vendor waves off the privacy questions, walk away

An installer who shrugs at 'can this see into a room?' or 'does the platform allow it?' is not the one for a lodging. These questions are the whole job here, and a good pro will answer them gladly.

If a guest finds a camera or complains

Even with everything done right, a guest may spot a camera and feel uneasy. How you handle that moment matters.

First, listen. A guest who raises it is giving you a chance to explain rather than leave a bad review. Point them to your disclosure, explain in plain terms what the camera watches and what it does not, and reassure them there is nothing in any private space.

If the complaint reveals a real problem — a camera that can see more than it should — fix it right away, before the next guest. And if a guest ever claims a camera was in a room or bathroom, treat that with the utmost seriousness: that's not a review problem, it's a legal one, and you should talk to a professional.

★ Call me before it escalates

If a guest raises a camera concern and you're not sure how to answer, call me at (330) 200-8042. I'll help you check what the camera actually sees and word a calm, honest reply — and tell you plainly if it's a question for a lawyer rather than a tech.

A quick room-by-room walk

Here's the whole property at a glance, so you can see where the lines fall without second-guessing each spot.

Area	Camera OK?
Lobby / front desk	Yes, with notice
Hallways / corridors	Yes, angled off rooms
Entrances / exits	Yes, with notice
Parking / driveway	Yes, with notice
Pool deck (shared)	Yes, with notice
Exterior / grounds	Yes, with notice
Guest rooms	Never
Bathrooms	Never
Changing areas	Never

Remember two things this table can't capture. On a short-term-rental platform, the indoor 'yes' rows likely become 'no' — Airbnb and Vrbo ban indoor cameras regardless. And every 'yes' depends on the camera's actual view not drifting into a private space.

✓ **The table is the start, the walk-through is the proof**

Use this as your map, then stand at each camera and confirm what it really sees. A spot that's a 'yes' on paper becomes a 'no' the moment the lens can peek through a doorway.

The rules keep moving — keep up

Airbnb's indoor-camera ban is a recent example of how fast these rules shift. What's fine today can be forbidden next season.

Platform policies in particular change often, and they can change worldwide overnight — the Airbnb indoor ban took effect on a single date in 2024 for every listing. A policy you read when you first listed may no longer be the one you're held to.

Build a simple habit: before each busy season, re-read your platform's current camera policy, and give your own setup a quick walk-through. It takes a few minutes and saves you from running afoul of a rule you didn't know had changed.

! Don't rely on this page as the final word

I've given you the rules as they stand, but they move — and I'm a tech helper, not a lawyer. Treat this as general information to plan with, and confirm the current platform policy and anything legal with the platform itself and an attorney who knows Ohio.

Getting started without overthinking it

You don't have to solve everything at once. A sensible order keeps it simple and keeps you clear.

Start outside and at the entrances — the spots that are allowed in the most cases and do the most good. Get those disclosed and aimed correctly first. For a rental host, that may be the whole project, since the inside stays camera-free.

Then, if you run a hotel and want common-area coverage, add the lobby and hallways with care, checking each camera's view as you go. Write your disclosure once and put it everywhere. Our planning guide gives you a full walk-through worksheet to lean on.

★ Let's build your plan together

Tell me whether you're a hotel or a rental host and what you rent, and I'll help you lay out a camera plan that protects the place, keeps guests comfortable, and stays on the right side of the rules. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from hotel owners and rental hosts, answered plainly.

Q: Can I ever put a camera in a guest room?

No. Guest rooms, bathrooms, and changing areas are off limits under Ohio's privacy and voyeurism rules — recording there secretly can be a crime. There's no exception for catching damage or settling a dispute.

Q: I host on Airbnb — can I keep an indoor camera if I turn it off?

No. Airbnb banned all indoor cameras in listings effective April 30, 2024, even if the device is off or unplugged. Take it down. Outdoor cameras are allowed only if you disclose them before booking.

Q: Are outdoor cameras always fine?

Not automatically. They must be disclosed, kept away from private areas, and never aimed at an indoor space or through a window. An outdoor camera that can see inside crosses the same line as an indoor one.

Q: Do I really need to tell guests about common-area cameras?

Yes. Common areas are allowed with clear notice — in the listing, the house rules, and a sign. A camera a guest knows about is sensible security; a hidden one is a problem.

Q: The rules seem to keep changing — how do I keep up?

Platform policies change often, so check the current policy before each season. This guide is general information, not legal advice; for your situation, confirm with the platform and an attorney who knows Ohio.

★ Still weighing it up?

Cameras at a lodging are one of those things that are simple once someone shows you the lines. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you get it right the first time, with nothing to sell you.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made cameras for your hotel or rental property feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it with your other business papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything — that's what the guide is for.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your place of business, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I'm a tech helper, not a licensed electrician or low-voltage contractor — for in-wall wiring or panel work I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro and make sure it all works together.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Where a Camera Belongs

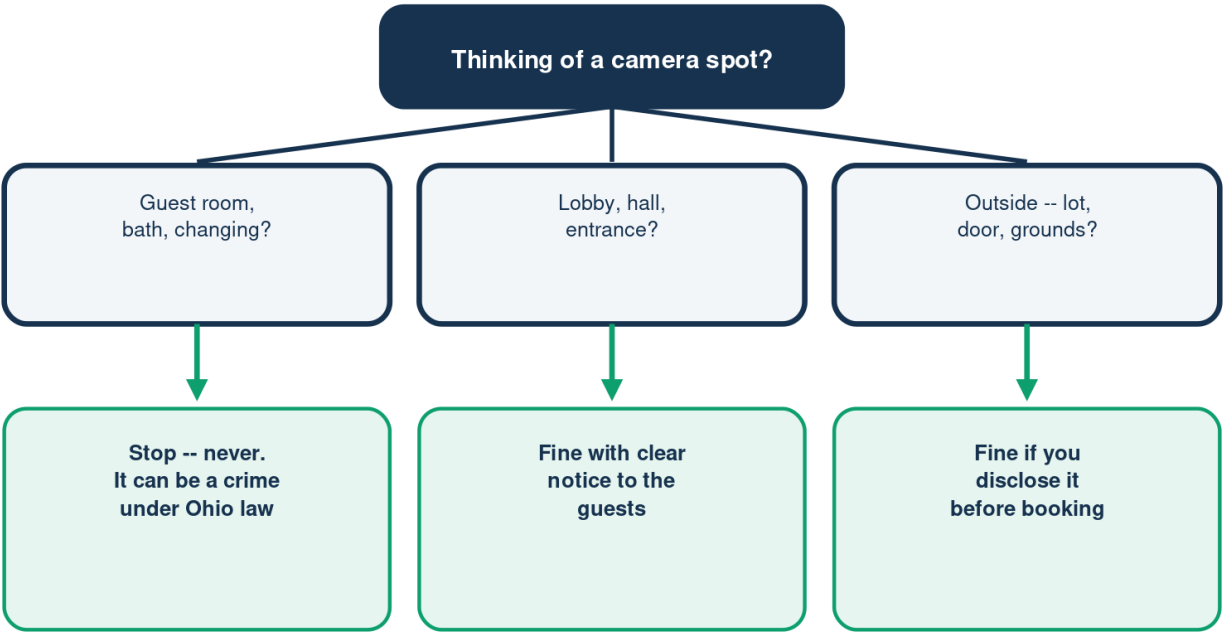
The shared and the outside -- never the private

	Camera OK?	With notice?
Lobby / entrance	Yes	Yes -- post it
Hallways	Yes	Yes -- post it
Parking / exterior	Yes	Yes -- disclose
Guest room	Never	Not allowed
Bathroom	Never	Not allowed

On Airbnb or Vrbo, indoor cameras are banned regardless.

Can I Put a Camera Here?

Three spots, three plain answers



On Airbnb or Vrbo? No indoor cameras at all -- check the platform.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

The Platforms vs the Law

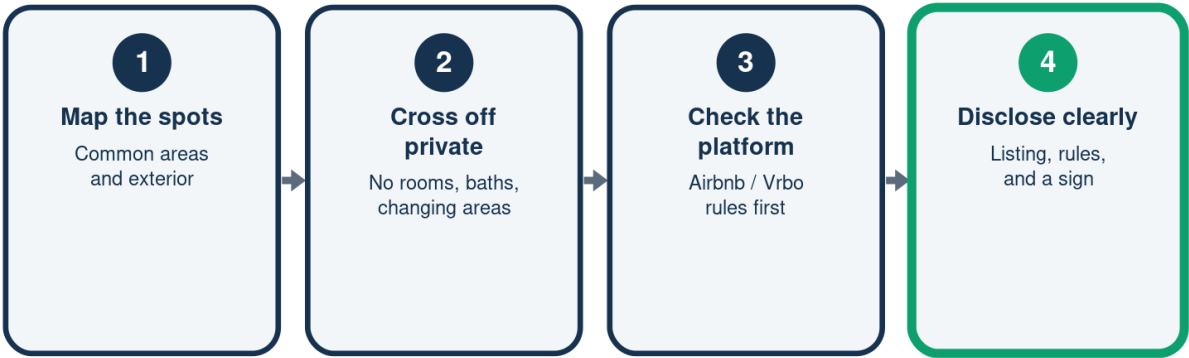
Booking sites are stricter than Ohio law

	Indoor cams	Outdoor cams
Airbnb	Banned -- all	Disclose first
Vrbo	Not inside	Inform guests
Small hotel	Common areas	With notice

Guest rooms and bathrooms are never allowed, anywhere.

Doing It Right, in Four Steps

The calm way to stay legal and fair



Do these in order and you'll stay on the right side of the line.



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to figure this out alone.

You just have to remember you can call.

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Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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