

Maggie McIntosh, Chair
Michael A. Jackson, Vice-Chair
House Office Building
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 1428, Environment – Higher
Education Facilities – Mold Hazards
and Mold or Moisture Problems

Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice-Chair Jackson, and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

I write today urging you to support HB 1428 establishing guidelines for mold inspection, identification, and mitigation in Maryland Institutions of Higher Education and requiring transparency in reporting the presence of mold to students, faculty, and staff.

I am an Anthropology PhD student in my third year at the University of Maryland (UMD), and I support this bill in part because of the ongoing mold problem in the Anthropology Building, Woods Hall. I first became aware of the mold issue in early fall 2018 when a fellow student in the Anthropology department developed severe rashes that their dermatologist linked to mold exposure. In discussing the situation with colleagues, I heard of other students, faculty, and staff members who had developed rashes, headaches, and/or respiratory symptoms that were linked to mold in Woods building. One of my classes that fall was moved to another building due to students' experiencing symptoms from mold in Woods, and I am aware of other classes that also were moved. Around the same time, I read news coverage of mold in residential buildings in the Diamondback (UMD student paper) and the Washington Post.

Mold problems were ongoing in Woods Building throughout fall semester 2018. I observed black mold in the ceiling tiles of the women's restroom on the lower floor of Woods Building. Once the mold was reported, the tiles were replaced, but at that time mold was found on a chilling pipe that runs throughout Woods suggesting mold had spread throughout the HVAC system. Students also became aware that a group of faculty members were unable to use their offices (on either side of the downstairs women's restroom) due to mold infestation and mitigation that semester. In fall 2018, extensive landscaping was done on both sides of Woods to mitigate moisture and leaks in the foundation of the building, and the situation seemed under control during spring semester 2019. However, upon returning to UMD at the end of summer break 2019, many faculty and staff found extensive mold growth in their offices. I personally observed mold on several books in my advisor's office, and the department was advised by Facilities Management to place dehumidifiers in the lower-floor offices. There was a general feeling of frustration that the completed work did not fix the problem. At that time, students, faculty, and staff in the department felt the problems in Woods were being largely ignored.

As the Anthropology department representative for UMD's Graduate Student Government (GSG), I brought up the ongoing mold issue in Woods Building during the first GSG meeting of the fall 2019 semester. During the Representative's Forum in the September 13th, 2019, meeting, I asked if other departments were experiencing similar mold-related issues. Some general discussion ensued regarding whether a resolution could be written urging UMD to ensure healthy spaces for students, faculty, and staff (although GSG's resolutions are an expression of student

concerns and are non-binding). I was approached after the meeting by a reporter from the Diamondback, and I spoke with her at length about my (limited) knowledge of the mold issue in Woods dating back to fall of 2018.

She then spoke to several faculty members and staff in Woods, publishing an article in the Diamondback titled “UMD faculty and students say they’ve been getting sick from mold in Woods Hall for years” (dated October 3, 2019). The article noted that mold had been an issue in the building since at least 2012, detailed the financial and health impacts to faculty and staff, and discussed the overall sense of frustration with the University’s response to date. The Washington Post then published an article entitled “Allergies, rashes and sinus headaches: U-Md. professors have been dealing with mold for years” (dated October 6, 2019) which summarized similar information. Ms. Roberts published a second article titled “Dozens of UMD housekeepers say they’ve gotten sick from cleaning mold” on October 8, 2019.

In the following month, GSG representatives discussed the possibility of drafting a joint resolution with representatives from the undergraduate Student Government Association (SGA) addressing ongoing infrastructure issues on campus. Representatives suggested the resolution should note that in its mission statement, UMD highlights the excellence of its students, faculty, and staff – but no one can learn or work to achieve excellence when they are being affected by environmental conditions in buildings that are making them sick. Representatives also wanted to call for transparency in funding these issues, as well as call for better funding for departments or other areas (like dorms) that will not see contributions from wealthy donors towards improved infrastructure. In mid-October, I spoke to my department chair and assistant chair, who felt like representatives from Facilities Management were moving forward in good faith with the mold issues in Woods Building, and I stepped back from the resolution at that time for fear that pressing further would in some way jeopardize the progress made by my department. On October 28, 2019, the Washington Post reported that UMD had installed sensors to monitor humidity in several dorm and academic buildings. On October 31st, residents of Tydings and Woods Buildings received an email from Dona-Leigh Morgan (who acts as a liaison between the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Facilities Management) notifying us of the sensor placement. Receiving this notice days after reading about it in a national news outlet made me feel like notifying residents of the building was an afterthought, and that our health and well-being was a lower priority than the possibility of future negative press coverage.

On October 10, 2019, an email was sent asking for GSG representatives who would be willing to sit on the Provost’s Student Advisory Council (ProvSAC), which includes members from both GSG and SGA, and I agreed to serve. I met with the chair of my department in mid-November, prior to the meeting, to discuss the mold mitigation efforts and ask how I could best represent the concerns of the department. The key issue in mitigation plans was that, given that Woods building is 70 years old, it would take anywhere from an estimated \$2 million dollars to renovate the HVAC system to provide climate control throughout the building to \$14 million to completely rehabilitate the building (at the time; current quotes range from \$3 million for replacement HVAC to \$25 million for complete rehabilitation). At that time, plans were in the works for a temporary fix including renovation of several individual faculty offices into a more open floor plan with a room-sized HVAC system to help control moisture and humidity in the new space, but no long-term solution has yet been agreed upon. I resolved to ask the Provost for

transparency in the allocation of funds to address mold issues related to aging infrastructure and whether President Loh's budget request included allocations towards improving infrastructure.

The meeting with the Provost and her associates took place on November 25th, 2019. After discussion with other graduate representatives on the council, we agreed to submit "concerns about aging infrastructure" as an agenda item. During the meeting, I asked if funds would be earmarked for refurbishing buildings. The Provost noted that I was from Anthropology and pointed out that there were several buildings that were "worse off" than Woods. She noted the President's budget request included a request for funding to address aging infrastructure, but it was "a little bit, but not enough" for all repairs needed. My takeaway from this conversation was that problems exist in many departments at the University of Maryland, and that mold and environmental factors that contribute to mold growth (I'm aware of heating/cooling issues, flooding, and roof collapses) are issues in several buildings.

My overall impression is that the response to mold and other infrastructure problems in Woods, Tydings, and other campus buildings has been haphazard, and that current solutions are temporary in nature. I do not feel there is a satisfactory long-term solution in place, and I am worried for the health of my colleagues – students, faculty, and staff – who must work and attend classes in Woods Building. Being told that there were several buildings worse off than Woods building was upsetting; given the toll the mold infestation has taken on my colleagues, it is awful to realize the same impacts are happening to faculty, students, and employees across the UMD campus. I also am concerned that part of the financial responsibility for repairs and renovations is falling to affected departments, which are predominantly "poor" departments with no wealthy donors to support infrastructure improvements. Requiring these departments to pay for repairs and mold mitigation takes money that would otherwise go to fund students and faculty, which in turn impacts learning and research outcomes and hurts UMD's standing as a R-1 university.

I support HB1428 because it proposes guidelines for inspections, mitigation, and reporting to ensure future mold infestations will be addressed in a systematic and timely manner. I want to see improved conditions not only for my colleagues at UMD, but for students, faculty, and staff across the University System of Maryland. I am aware that this issue is not limited to UMD, as a similar mold infestation took place at St. Mary's College of Maryland in 2011. Friends in the department who attended St. Mary's have discussed how, at that time, they were required to live on a cruise ship for several weeks during mold abatement in dorms. As the parent of a senior who will be attending St. Mary's this fall, I support this bill not only for my colleagues and friends, but for the well-being of all future students, families, faculty, and staff within the University System of Maryland.

Thank you for your consideration of HB1428.

Valerie M.J. Hall
PhD Student, Anthropology Department
Teaching Assistant and Graduate Student Government Representative
University of Maryland, College Park