

## HB 976

### Mold Assessment and Remediation – Standards

Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

3/30/2023 - 1:00pm

Testimony of Mrs. Jenese Jones Oden

My name is Jenese Jones Oden and I am a resident of Glen Burnie, Maryland. Today, as I share my testimony, I would like to say that my story is not unique nor is it an isolated account, but one that is impacting the lives of many families in my neighborhood, county and across the state. **For the past two years, I have lived with mold infestation in my rented townhome** and struggled to find the perfect remedy to the solution. In April 2020 during the initial weeks of the COVID 19 shutdown, I was in the process of moving into a new home. We were thrilled when we went on the initial tour of the property, admiring all of the hardwood floors, new appliances and bells and whistles. Unbeknownst to us, what lingered beneath the beautiful aesthetics was a burgeoning mold infestation that had been lingering there for many years( I later learned the previous tenant that they left for that reason). **Two months into our stay, we would begin to notice black mold spores on the air ducts and a stale smell in the air. As we all grappled with the newness of living in the pandemic and being sheltered in place at home for days and weeks on end, I began to grow concerned when I started seeing a pattern of coughing, sneezing and other respiratory issues. I didn't grow up having asthma, bronchitis or any respiratory challenge for that matter, but it became a very prevalent part of my life.** After several hard fought battles with maintenance and the property management company to address the issue, minimal support was provided and a few aesthetic fixes were implemented (*they changed the air vents but did not test for mold in the unit*). I will never forget coming home from a weeks' long's trip this past spring only to be met at the door with the smell of a musty living room when I came in. It was alarming and unbearable. I did a U-turn and headed to Walgreens to buy every Febreze and I could find. I was furious because I had been complaining for months to the property manager that I have been living with mold. **Several times during the lockdown, I thought that I actually contracted Covid and would go to Patient's First for PCR testing - and in one more intense case, the emergency room at Baltimore Washington Medical Center. Everytime, I feared I had contracted COVID. It was never COVID, but a diagnosis of "acute respiratory infection."**

The only factor that I could put together as a constant variable was me living in a house with mold and working remotely 80% of the time. **Until I paid \$400 for a private company to conduct a mold assessment (see *attached report*), I had no idea that the levels of mold in the air had reached a point where the home was deemed uninhabitable.** The property management company told me and several other families in the community that they could not address the situation unless we vacated the property. **The caveat was if you were carrying a balance on your account (as were many families who had experienced financial hardship during the pandemic), they would not honor the lease agreement. The lease stated that a remediation was required by the property management company after 7 days of written notification.**

The issues were far deeper. Knowing what I know now and with great legal advice, I will be pursuing legal action against the property management company. What hurts me most about this entire process is that the **property management team expressed how the issue was “out of their hands” and they had to follow the directives of the corporate office. They knew what we were facing was shameful and environmentally unjust, yet had to follow orders from their corporate office** in Pennsylvania.

As I mentioned, **I speak for hundreds of families who live in rental properties plagued with mold.** I know of families in Worcester county, Charles county, Prince George's county and a few others in our great state who are also living with mold issues. Although this may not be a relevant point, it is notable enough for me to share that **99.9% of the families affected in my neighborhood are working and middle class families across diverse backgrounds. Diverse not only by race, but age and economic status.** One of my neighbors uses a breathing machine and has struggled to function in her home because of air quality issues. Another neighbor who recently had a newborn is being forced to break her lease after finding high levels of mold in the unit and fears for the health of her little girl. There are many other stories, but time does not allow me to share them all. Please take a moment to review the mold assessment which shows the extent of the mold damage incurred and the peace of mind my family has lost over the past two years. My hope is that this bill will receive a **favorable** report. In my humble opinion, I don't see this as a partisan issue, but an **issue that any Marylander could be faced with.**

In Gratitude,

*Jenese Jones Oden*

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