

HB 129

Testimony of Tisha Guthrie, Bolton House Residents Association (BHRA)

HB 129 - Environment – Mold Inspections–Standards, Reporting, and Penalties

Before the House Environment and Transportation Committee, Jan. 20, 2021

Position: **FAVORABLE**

My name is Tisha Guthrie and I have lived, learned and worked in Maryland most of my life. Due to various medical conditions which have affected my health status, I qualified for and was granted a Housing Choice Voucher and have been a participant since 2010. My experiences with various landlords, property managers and local housing agencies led me to my involvement in both local and statewide housing justice initiatives. Currently, I am an active member of Renters United Maryland (RUM), Baltimore Renters United (BRU) and Bolton House Residents Association (BHRA).

Due to the lack of mold testing mandates and air quality standards, I have been exposed to toxic mold with no legal recourse. Before the COVID 19 pandemic and the stay-in-place order, I had begun experiencing unusual sinus-like symptoms on a daily basis. Noticeable changes in my breathing, hair, skin and digestion have also been consequences. After 10 months of virtual confinement to a mold infested building, not only have these symptoms been exacerbated but chronic headaches are now a burden that I bear.

Since 2013, I have resided at Bolton House Apartments under the management of Edgewood Property management. During this time, I have witnessed and personally experienced the health consequences of poorly maintained housing. For the purpose of brevity I will not list the bevy of infractions by this company. **What is endemic is the uncontrolled and unaddressed mold issue which, on a daily basis, imposes serious health threats and long-term consequences. Such conditions are unacceptable and toxic for the general population. For someone like me, who has an eye condition which has left me with partial vision, a kidney and a pancreas transplant, such exposure can indeed be lethal and/or fatal.**

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In 2020, Maryland renters who live in mold-affected homes faced the dual risk of coronavirus outside the home and respiratory illness inside it. They had nowhere to turn for reprieve and, in absence of a law that prescribes how mold defects in housing should be assessed and remediated, renters had little if any recourse to compel property owners to remove mold from their units. HB 129 is the law Maryland renters need at this critical time.

Across the state, without standards or guideposts on mold, renters are paying the price for Maryland's lack of black-letter standards on mold and mold-affected housing. The threat to tenant health and safety posed by the presence of mold in the home is clear. In the anecdotal experience of Bolton House Residents Association, the elderly and those with existing respiratory problems suffer the worst, and in some cases have been hospitalized as a suspected result of unmitigated mold growth. Many renter families also suspect domestic mold to be the cause of their children's asthma development. [A 2009 review of existing literature](#) on the health effects of dampness and mold by the World Health Organization found a substantial body of evidence of an association with upper respiratory tract symptoms, coughing, wheezing, asthma development in otherwise healthy children, and exacerbation of already diagnosed asthma. Maryland law should protect renter families from the potentially long-term adverse health outcomes resulting from poor property management.

HB 129 is a first, crucial step toward a comprehensive solution to mold in rental housing. It requires multiple Maryland agencies to collaboratively devise standards that fill gaps in current law. As a Maryland resident who prides herself in being the change she desires to see in the world, I take seriously my part in the equation necessary to affect change. It is my fervent hope that this committee will honor its role and offer a favorably report on HB 129.

Respectfully,

Tisha Guthrie, MSW, LMSW

Treasurer, Bolton House Residents Association (BHRA)