



House Bill 129

Environment – Mold Inspections – Standards, Reporting, and Penalties

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

Position: FAVORABLE

My name is Tiffany Ralph, and I am a renter who resides at 1100 Bolton St. (Bolton House Apartments) here in Baltimore City. My son and I have lived here at Bolton House since April of 2014, and I have watched as the building has fallen into serious disrepair due to lack of proper maintenance being provided by the management company, Edgewood Management.

When my son and I first moved in, we were told that we should report any signs of mold to the rental office immediately so they could take steps to clean it up; at the time I had no idea what their version of “clean it up” meant, but unfortunately found out in October of 2018 when my serious mold accumulation was discovered. I will need to start in 2017 however, due to the fact that my situation was the result of lack of care and attention by management over several months’ time. I had started noticing random pools of water that would appear unexpectedly on my bathroom floor in 2017. The first time that it happened, I had gone into the bathroom to retrieve an item and noticed that my floor was slippery, and when I looked down, I saw that there was a small pool of water that had accumulated at the base of my vanity. I checked the toilet, the tub, and underneath the sink for signs of visible water as well as using a tissue to wipe and look for signs of liquid, but there weren’t any wet spots that I could find, so I got my mop and mopped it up. I kept checking over the next few days for more water but I found the floor to be dry, and I concluded that my son must have spilled some water that morning when he was brushing his teeth. Imagine my surprise when the same scenario happened again a few weeks later, but with more water and my son being gone for the weekend. Again, I tried to locate the source of the leak but again came up empty, so I called the management office and was told that I had probably either overflowed the toilet or flooded my sink, both of which I knew to be untrue and I said so to the office staff. They then sent maintenance up to my unit, he took a quick glance around, said that I had no leaks that he could see, and he left. The issue continued to persist over the next several months with random pools that water that were progressed into my bathroom floor being flooded, and the management office telling me that it most definitely had to be due to my son and I’s errors. So, by October of 2018, when the flooding got so bad that I was having to get up every morning and mop up my bathroom floor with bleach water just so my son and I could use our own facilities, and I had gone through

three gallons of bleach in a two-week period, I'd had enough. I had to call the emergency maintenance line three nights in a row to have maintenance come back to the building to figure out what the problem was. During one of the emergency visits, I had removed my storage baskets that were underneath my sink in the vanity, and found the huge black mold spot. The maintenance guy pulled up the vanity shelf and found the entire subfloor covered with black mold and an inch or two of water. As a result, he opened the wall behind my toilet to see if he could figure out where the water was coming from, and found that it was coming from inside the wall in my bathroom. He called the head of maintenance to report the issue and was told that a plumber would be out to further inspect in the next day or two. That inspection led to a two-week nightmare of learning that the liquid wasn't water but raw sewage, and the management allowed the wall in my bathroom to remain open with only a plastic sheet covering the area. The mold was cleaned up by maintenance using an entire bottle of bleach, which in turn caused toxic fumes and seeped into our apartment for four days. That was the start of severe mold issues inside of my unit. As of today, I have had mold inside of my closet, growing around the ENTIRE perimeter of my tub, growing on my bedroom wall beneath my HVAC vent, and growing on the tape that I placed on my intake vent door to keep the door closed. I have been told several times over by management, both on site as well as upper management, that it's not mold but mildew. However, the "mildew" has caused such severe medical issues in my body that I must now put special drops in my eyes every night before I go to bed just so my eyelids won't stick to my eyeballs when I wake up; I went from being able to walk on a treadmill for 60 minutes on an incline while talking on the phone for the full hour and not being winded, to finding it necessary to stop on the fourth floor landing in my stairwell just to catch my breath before continuing, and waking up in the mornings to find fresh blood in my mucus after blowing my nose to clear the congestion that I wake up with every single morning now. I have spoken to attorneys who have told me that if there were laws on the books that I would most definitely have an open and shut case, but that because of the current lack of laws and legislation that my case would most likely be thrown out of court.

HB 129 makes great steps toward providing desperately needed solutions to this problem. By creating definitive standards, HB 129 will strengthen renters' bases for legal actions that will compel landlords to remediate mold or compensate tenants for living in hazardous conditions. The current lack of standards fails to protect tenants by providing a safe recourse with which to hold landlords legally accountable under, and this failure further exacerbates the likelihood that tenants have little to no recourse under which they are able to move themselves and their families into a nontoxic environment in which to heal.

According to an article in Psychology Today dated August 3, 2017 written by Judy Tsafir, M.D. (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/holistic-psychiatry/201708/mold-toxicity-common-cause-psychiatric-symptoms>); mold exposure doesn't just cause physical ailments which are numerous, but psychological ailments as well. A few of those listed in the article are depression, anxiety, and brain fog. The article continues on to include a list of 37 common physical symptoms resulting from mold exposure which include ice pick pains, vertigo, and

tremors., which as you can see goes far beyond just the serious respiratory ailments caused by this toxin. As a result, Maryland law must go the distance in providing renters protections from potentially long-term health outcomes resulting from poor property management.

HB 129 is a crucial step toward providing a comprehensive solution to the compounding mold issues for renters in Maryland. HB 129 will provide requirements that will hold multiple Maryland agencies accountable to by providing standards that will fill in the gaps in the current laws.

Bolton House Residents Association therefore urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 129.

