



MARYLAND
LEGAL AID

Advancing
Human Rights and
Justice for All

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January 18, 2021

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Chairman, Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building,
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 129
Environment-Mold Inspections-Standards, Reporting and Penalties**

Dear Chairperson Barve and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding HB 129. This bill seeks to address the issue of mold in rental dwelling units, an important issue that affects tenants throughout the state. Maryland Legal Aid is a private, non-profit organization that provides free legal services to indigent Maryland residents. MLA assists individuals and families in every county with a wide array of civil legal issues, including housing, consumer, public benefits, and family law matters. This letter serves as notice that Gregory Countess will be testifying on behalf of Maryland Legal Aid at Delegate Henson's request. Maryland Legal Aid supports HB 129 with favorable amendments and asks that this committee give it a favorable report.

Mold and its pernicious effects on rental housing residents have long plagued residents, and local jurisdictions have struggled to remedy its devastating effects on residents and their health broadly. A Tenant Council and its members lived in a flooded senior living community because pipes carrying water in the buildings burst. It damaged the walls and carpeting throughout the buildings. The damaged carpet remained in the common areas for approximately seven months after the flood, which provided a breeding ground for mold. The flood-damaged units in the building did not have their carpets replaced or repairs made. Moisture and water from the HVAC system caused mold and mold spores to grow in the HVAC system and mold to grow on the units' walls and floor covering.

The residents believed that some of the health problems they were experiencing were not due to the natural aging process but were a direct result of an ever-increasing environmental problem. Some residents who had never suffered from respiratory

problems, such as asthma, or bronchitis, found themselves on medication and getting worse. Those who had a history of allergies, but managed symptoms well over the years, experienced an increase in medication use and symptoms.

Both the local jurisdiction and the County in which the housing was located had rental housing inspection units. But both reportedly did not have the capacity or the will to test for mold. Residents had to purchase their own mold testing kits or engage mold inspectors on their own. Others who could not afford to test for mold merely suffered. The owner took half-hearted steps to address this pervasive problem.

This story is not an isolated incident. Throughout the state, MLA's advocates have seen numerous tenants who have had to endure the outrageous and health-endangering effects of mold. Most recently, in a high-profile case that involved a local housing authority and a local jurisdiction, numerous tenants suffered because of extensive mold in their units and the life-altering effects mold had on their family's health. MLA had to file a federal lawsuit on behalf of these individuals to resolve the issue.

The right to housing includes the right to live in safe housing. This bill provides a process, a standard, and a penalty to close a hole in Maryland law and help ensure the safety of rental housing residents.

For these reasons, Maryland Legal Aid supports HB 129 and asks that this committee give it a favorable report.

Sincerely

/s/

Gregory Leo Countess, Esq.
Director of Advocacy for Housing and Community Development
Maryland Legal Aid

cc: Stuart O. Simms, Chief Counsel, Maryland Legal Aid