



Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

**Testimony to the House Environment & Transportation Committee
HB129: Environment - Mold Inspections - Standards, Reporting, and Penalties
Position: Favorable**

January 20, 2021

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chair
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, HOB
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Environment and Transportation Committee

Honorable Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances economic rights and financial inclusion for Maryland consumers through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 8,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

We are writing today in support of HB129.

Through the creation of a uniform standard for mold assessment and remediation, HB129 would add protections from mold exposure to the already existing state laws that shield Maryland renters from the environmental hazards of radon, asbestos, lead-based paint, and methane when they are found in the home. With over a third of Marylanders living in rental units, these protections are greatly needed to ensure renters are living in units that meet a minimum livability standard and do not pose a health risk. The impact of mold exposure has been linked to upper respiratory tract symptoms, coughing, wheezing, and the development or exacerbation of asthma. The provisions of the bill would also provide Maryland with an opportunity to lessen the racial health gap as discussed below.

Currently, Maryland does not have any laws that specifically address a landlord's duties or liability when it comes to mold prevention and remediation¹. The avenues available for tenants to try to recover damages from their landlord often require legal action and leave tenants vulnerable to the emotional and financial stress of the legal system². The lack of regulations around the disclosure of mold place the onus on the tenant rather than the property owner or landlord. While the burden of the mold remediation falls on the tenant, tenants' abilities to treat mold may be limited by their lease -- which could prevent construction or demolition within the property-- or their financial state; on average,

1

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/environment-and-natural-resources/maryland-landlord-and-tenant-duties.aspx>

² <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/maryland-rules-regarding-mold-rental-properties.html>



professional mold remediation costs \$500 to \$6,000 – but the price can soar into the tens of thousands if the problem is severe³.

Furthermore, this bill would provide Maryland with the opportunity to actively work to close the racial health gap. Not only is mold a matter of public health, the health impacts from exposure also pose a civil rights issue. A report by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America finds that the burden of asthma in the United States falls disproportionately on Black, Hispanic and American Indian/Alaska Native people. These groups have the highest asthma rates, deaths, and hospitalizations. Black Americans are 1.5 times more likely to have asthma, 3 times more likely to die from it, and 5 times more likely to visit the emergency department because of it⁴. In Maryland, the rate of asthma-related hospitalizations is 1.3 times higher than the U.S. average. In Baltimore city, the rate is nearly 3 times higher than the national average⁵. Given that social determinants and structural inequities largely drive disparities in asthma, more so than factors such as genetics and individual behaviors, it is clear that this health disparity is linked to the legacy of segregation in housing practices directed against persons of color.

Maryland should join the 15 other states and the District of Columbia in recognizing the importance of indoor air quality mold regulations for the financial and physical health of tenants.

For all these reasons, we support HB129 and urge a favorable report.

Best,

Isadora Stern
Economic & Tenants' Rights Organizer

³ <https://realtimelab.com/mold-statistics/>

⁴ <https://www.aafa.org/asthma-disparities-burden-on-minorities.aspx>

⁵ <https://environmentalintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Baltimore-Asthma.pdf>