

**HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
21-0079R - Informational Hearing – Mold**

**Health, Environment, and Technology Committee of the Baltimore City Council
February 9, 2022**



Health Care for the Homeless appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony in describing the pervasive and harmful effects of mold in the homes of many of our clients.

For the clients we serve, individuals and families experience homelessness or housing insecurity, many are forced to live in unsafe and unhealthy housing conditions. The problem of mold arises frequently for our clients and often takes landlords a long time to resolve it, if at all. You will hear oral testimony from one of our peer recovery specialists stating for one of this clients, the property management company has altogether refused to resolve a dangerous mold infestation. Maintenance issues are rampant in public housing, in particular.

Our supportive housing team works closely with property managers to address issues facing clients in their housing situation. In one such situation, one of our clients, Ms. Jones,¹ had visible black spots in her home, which were of particular concern, as Ms. Jones and her children all have health issues that can be triggered by mold. Ms. Jones also experienced hospitalizations, which she attributed to the conditions of the unit. An independent mold inspection was conducted, which confirmed the presence of mold. It took multiple staff from our supportive housing team to follow up with property managers to ensure actions were taken to remediate the mold infestation in our client's home.

Children face particular challenges with regard to mold exposure. Living in poor housing conditions increase the likelihood of mold and negative respiratory outcomes. There have been significant health studies done on the link between mold and childhood asthma.² Dr. Iris Leviner, Health Care for the Homeless' Director of Pediatric and Family Medicine, details that the children she cares for in her clinical practice often experience asthma symptoms triggered by mold exposures at home. As with many families who face housing insecurity, these triggers are common in the types of housing situations our clients are often forced to experience, including mold. Dr. Leviner shared a story about a family she sees in her practice: "A few weeks ago, I met a family who are long time clients of our clinic. They have experienced episodes of homelessness over many years. I saw two of the young adolescent children who were doing really well since moving in to a shelter. Mom shared with me that their asthma symptoms had markedly improved since moving in to the shelter — from requiring a rescue inhaler almost daily to the current situation in which both parent and child were having trouble remembering if or when they last needed the inhaler. Mom attributed this to a change in environmental exposures, that the kids were no longer experiencing asthma triggers now that they had left a home with multiple triggers. I thought this was remarkable."

¹This name is a pseudonym to maintain client privacy and confidentiality.

² See *Household Molds Linked to Childhood Asthma*, at <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/household-molds-linked-childhood-asthma>; See also *Household mold, pesticide use, and childhood asthma: A nationwide study in the U.S.*, at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33556714/>.

Mold exposure in children also has far-reaching consequences in a child's life well beyond medical issues. As our supportive housing providers and case managers can attest, children with respiratory issues miss days from school, which can adversely impact learning and school performance. Dr. Leviner also adds that "children with asthma that is difficult to control experience marked effects on wellness well beyond the disease itself including missed school days, frequent/long ED visits, impacts on their physical activity and social activities and related effects."

We thank this Committee for investigating the impact of mold exposure on the health and lives of Baltimore residents. We look forward to working with the Baltimore City Council to address these issues, particularly for individuals and families experiencing homelessness and forced to live in unsafe conditions.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We work to prevent and end homelessness for vulnerable individuals and families by providing quality, integrated health care and promoting access to affordable housing and sustainable incomes through direct service, advocacy, and community engagement. We deliver integrated medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.