

Tiffany Ralph Written Testimony:

Resident of Baltimore City

201 N. Schroeder St. Apt 201

Baltimore, MD 21223 [Resolution](#)

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**Health, Environment, and Technology committee**

Good morning, Councilmembers,

My name is Tiffany Ralph, and my son and I are current residents of Baltimore City. We moved here from California in 2012, and have lived in the city this entire time. We have had many challenges here, housing in particular, and felt like we had finally found stability when we moved into Bolton House Apartments in 2015. What we thought of as a blessing turned out to be a true nightmare as our residency at Bolton House was inundated with safety issues, rodent and bed bug infestations, heating and cooling issues, and worst of all, mold issues caused by ruptured and leaking pipes inside the walls and ceilings throughout the building. After several attempts of trying to get the property management to do their job and fix the issues, I found it necessary to reach out to several agencies and entities outside of Bolton House and Edgewood Management, including some of you here today, but even those attempts ended with “let me check into that”, “I’m so sorry that you’re going through this”, or “well, Maryland doesn’t currently have laws on the books to hold landlords accountable, so while this is absolutely terrible, there’s not much that you can do”.

You see, my son and I were living in a unit that had many leaks; the biggest one being the corroded sewage pipe inside the wall behind my toilet. The same sewage pipe, as it turns out, that according to the housing inspector who came to see the ceiling to floor hole in my wall behind the toilet that was left open for a week and a half, said should have been replaced 15 years before the day of the inspection, that was leaking raw sewage into our bathroom onto our floor, flooding it occasionally, then several times a week, but eventually turning into several times a day for over a year. Management kept telling my son and I that it was just water from us either forgetting to turn the shower off and not pulling the curtain before we left the house for the day, or that we were overflowing the toilet and not realizing our mistake. Either way, they were blaming us for the issue. It wasn’t until I called the emergency maintenance number one night after I had mopped up my flooded floor twice, and it flooded for a third time in a 20-minute span did I call the emergency maintenance number. The maintenance guy on call came with tools in hand to try and find where the leak was coming from, but it wasn’t until I pulled my bathroom caddies out from underneath the sink that we found the large black mold spot on the shelf in the cabinet, and that prompted the maintenance guy to bust through the shelf with a hammer and flashlight. When he’d put a big enough hole into the shelf to look inside, his reaction was “What the... You’re going to want to stand back for this”. He then used the hammer and his hands to tear out the rest of the shelf, and that was when we both saw that there was standing water (raw sewage) sitting beneath the shelf, and underneath the water was black mold completely covering the sub floor.

That was one of four locations inside our unit that we found black mold in during our tenancy. As a result of living in those conditions, my health has been significantly affected. I developed autoimmune disorders, I now suffer from severe allergic reactions in the form of lengthy sneezing attacks if I'm anywhere near mold that cause my eyes and sinuses to swell, significant respiratory issues to the point that most nights I would pray and ask God to let me live through the night because I was wheezing so bad that it felt like my lungs were filling up with mucus, and I was afraid that I would suffocate in my sleep; I didn't want my son to find my body the next morning and have to deal with that for the rest of his life. My hair was falling out in small clumps, my memory was so bad that I couldn't remember conversations that I had just had with my son five to ten minutes before I asked him the exact same question that we had just discussed. I developed skin sensitivities which some days would result in me itching incessantly even after bathing and applying moisturizer, I developed a fungal infection on my scalp, as well as severe dry eye which has caused the need for me to use special drops in my eyes every night before I go to sleep, because if I don't then my eyelids stick to my eyeballs and I have to peel them off in order to open my eyes to start my day. And if that isn't bad enough, in November of 2017, I had to have surgery and was released home to recuperate. Two days after my surgery, I had to be rushed to the hospital because I couldn't breathe. They did extensive tests, x-rays, and scans but couldn't find the reason for my breathing difficulties. When I told the doctors, nurses, and social worker that I lived in an apartment building that was infested with mold, they all said that was most likely the reason I was struggling to breathe and should do my best to move. I also started having anxiety attacks, days of depression, and bouts of insomnia. All according to the article in the August 3, 2017 edition of Psychology Today (attached below), are symptoms of mold toxicity, along with several others.

You may or may not know what it feels like to live knowing that you and your child are living under such deplorable and hazardous conditions, but I do, and that very little if anything can be done. Judges don't seem to care that tenants are getting sick, and in some cases dying as a result of mold exposure/toxicity. They just seem to brush it off as an inconvenience that tenants had to deal with. Current state and city laws aren't written to protect tenants here in Maryland, but side in favor of landlords. That needs to change. As toxic and damaging as mold is, landlords and property management companies need to be held accountable by standards in the form of laws that need to be put in place to ensure that not another individual, family, neighbor, or constituent are placed in harms way because officials and agencies turn a blind eye to the plight that is right in front of them. Mold should be regulated and treated in the same manner as carbon monoxide because they're both silent killers. One kills within minutes while the other kills very slowly over a period of time. Neither of which is okay by me, and I would hope not by any of you as well.

I am asking you today to please do right by the city who entrusted you through the election process to work and speak on our behalf to make this right. I'm asking on behalf of all of your constituents to step out of your own shoes and into ours, and ask yourselves if you're comfortable with your mother, father, sibling, or children living this way? Ask yourself, "if this were me, would I do everything in my power to make sure that my loved ones and myself are safe?" As you lay your head down at night, and look around at your surroundings you know that you're going to sleep in an environment that isn't making you sick or that will have long-term health effects on you and your loved ones. All we're asking Councilmembers is for that very same assurance. We ask that you pass laws that hold landlords and property management accountable to assure that we have the same courtesies. Thank you.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/holistic-psychiatry/201708/mold-toxicity-common-cause-psychiatric-symptoms>