

I have been a tenant at an Avesta Housing property called Pinewood Apartments, in Parsonsfield, Maine, since July of 2013. I moved into a two-bedroom apartment with my six-year-old son, during the seventh month of my second pregnancy, after experiencing homelessness. I was grateful to have a roof over my children's heads and a place to call home that I was able to afford. I have slowly felt less and less grateful and more and more stuck in an unhealthy home through the years. About a year after I moved in, I found mold growing on the bathroom ceiling of my apartment. I notified property management and maintenance. Though there wasn't much of a response from property management, if at all, the maintenance worker at the time handed me a green bottle of some sort of mold cleaner and a step ladder and told me to clean it myself. I attempted to do so, but the mold always returned. I continued to notify Avesta Housing staff, but nothing ever came of it until 2015. In 2015, after continuing to report mold, I had some sort of air quality test performed in my apartment and was told that the results showed "livable mold" likely due to poor housekeeping, clutter, not running the bathroom fan long enough or turning the heat down to sixty degrees during the day when not at home (I paid for my own heat at the time and was trying to save money). This didn't make sense to me, as the mold remained only in my bathroom, thereby reflecting that clutter and housekeeping had nothing to do with it. I grew up in a mold-free home where my mother turned the heat down during the day when we were not home.

I eventually moved into a three-bedroom apartment at the same property in August of 2017. By September of 2017 I was reporting mold under the bathroom sink in the new apartment. The mold went unaddressed and continued to grow in the bathroom, reaching the ceiling above the shower, just as it had in the previous apartment. I began experiencing frequent sinus infections, bronchitis, asthma problems, extreme fatigue, cognitive problems, skin rashes, headaches and more. My son began having migraine headaches and frequent illnesses, coughing in his sleep and was given an asthma diagnosis. My daughter eventually developed symptoms as well. Both children were put on allergy medication. I continued to report the mold growing with no response from Avesta Housing staff. I began reporting more frequently during the time that I was pregnant with my third child in 2018 and 2019, as my symptoms grew worse as did the mold growth. I began to learn more about how mold impacts human health and was far more concerned for my unborn child than I had been not knowing this information. When she was born, she had trouble with feeding, random unexplained skin rashes, trouble sleeping and many upper respiratory and ear infections. She has had pneumonia at least once prior to the age of five. She was diagnosed with oropharyngeal dysphagia as a baby and bladder retention issues due to constipation problems at the age of 3. I have always wondered if these diagnoses could be attributed to mold exposure during pregnancy.

When I reported mold appearing on the bedroom ceilings in my apartment in January of 2022, the response that I received from the property manager was as follows: “The first thing they will look into is are there plants in unit, fish tank and clutter as I know from other properties these are all reasons mold will grow and on windows also if windows are not sealed by lock completely. There has to be air flow in unit and alit of clutter will not help this. Also a fish tank of your size as to why in the lease they are not allowed that big. It’s a 10 gallon tank or one pet per pet policy. Just a few things to look at. We have had professionals at Pinewood test other units with similar problems and it comes back as not a dangerous mold and the items I listed as potenial causes.”

Shortly afterward, the new maintenance technician that Avesta Housing had hired came to my apartment for another issue and I showed him the mold in my bedrooms. He agreed that it was a problem that needed tending and began the process of doing so. Over the next year, I was in communication with Avesta Housing staff regarding testing and remediating the mold in my home. It was not until June of 2023 that anything was addressed. In June an air quality test was performed in my apartment that showed dangerous levels of dangerous molds present both as surface mold and airborne mold in my home. My family was then displaced from my apartment until November of 2023, as the company hired to complete the remediation did not effectively do so per an air quality test performed in July of 2023, after work had been completed, that showed stachybotrys surface mold present on the wall studs of my bathroom. This strain of mold is known as “toxic black mold,” and had not been present on the first air quality test, only showing up after the walls had been opened up. After going through my belongings and disposing of most of what my children and I owned, causing further financial burden, my family moved back into our apartment in November 2023. In December of 2023, I found the mini split unit in my living room to be operating in a way that was not normal. It was two days before Christmas when I looked at it and discovered mold inside the unit. My family was displaced from our home again due to this new discovery of mold, on February 8, 2024 to a hotel in Scarborough, ME, about an hour away from our home and community in which we were heavily involved. This was detrimental to my family’s mental health. We were displaced with several of our neighbors, as their apartments had shown dangerous levels of dangerous molds during air quality testing in their apartments as well. While my neighbors and I were displaced, we worried about what would happen to our homes and belongings and what was required of Avesta Housing to fix the problem. Both times that I was displaced from my home I contacted the Public Health Officer and never heard back from him. I contacted the Code Enforcement Officer for my town, who told me that he had no experience with mold but would try to help, and I believe he made every effort that he could, but did not have enough knowledge about mold to be confident in the repair process. I contacted every lawyer I could think of or get the name of from others, including Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic, Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project and Pine Tree Legal. No one could help other than to refer me to Pine Tree Legal who does not have the resources to help. I contacted Maine Indoor Air Quality

several times with no response. I contacted the Attorney General's office, Disability Rights Maine, DHHS, Child Protective Services, the CDC and the infectious disease reporting hotline they referred me to. I spoke with mold remediation companies who all seemed to have only vague information about the mold remediation process. I reached out to college science departments. I called all of my children's physicians, as well as my own, and none of them were able to help, not even able to find appropriate testing for my children and me to determine how living in mold had impacted our health. I reached out to a homeopathic doctor and was finally able to achieve mycotoxin testing but only for myself and one child, as each test cost around \$300, money that I don't have as a single mother living in low-income housing. I spoke with Adam Hartwig, the Public Health Liaison for my county. I contacted my town hall, state Representative and Senator. It was not until I spoke with Senator Libby that I felt I was heard, and this problem had any hope of being solved, not for me but perhaps for future tenants in Maine. No one was able to help guide me through my mold problem. I found that Avesta Housing had trouble with determining the scope of work to remediate the mold problem at Pinewood Apartments. This is not fair. If there were to be laws outlining how to handle mold in rented homes here in Maine, we would be able to protect both tenants and landlords. As it stands now, no one knows what to do about mold and therefore nothing gets done. When nothing is done, mold grows, spreads and makes people sick. My family, my innocent children, may have lifelong health problems after living in mold for years because of the lack of legislation outlining how it should be addressed. There is no specific verbiage in the current law regarding how mold impacts the warranty of habitability in a home, as there is no legal definition of safe nor dangerous levels of mold. There is no verbiage in the current law to address the response time to mold complaints by tenants, which can be imperative as mold can grow rapidly. There is no law outlining the proper testing, proper repair or proper authorities to involve when addressing mold complaints in rented homes. The authorities tasked with addressing mold complaints often do not have proper training or education to properly do so. There is no legal guidance on proper testing methods, time frames, proper tools or procedures to remediate mold. There is nothing in the current law stating how to handle the impact on human health when tenants are found to be living in a home infested with dangerous molds. There are laws pertaining to injuries sustained in the workplace, but no laws pertaining to injuries sustained in the home due to this fungus that can slowly take away a person's ability to function and eventually even kill a person.

I have experienced quite a bit of difficulty in my thirty-six years here on earth, most of them spent here in Maine, but none as difficult as the mold infestation and remediation process that I have lived through over the last ten or so years. My mental health has suffered, as has the mental health of my children. My physical health, along with the physical health of my children, has been impacted in such a way that I have a hard time with basic functioning,

nevermind working to support my family. Due to the significant negative impact that my family has experienced, I feel that it is imperative that laws are passed preventing this from happening to Mainers in the future. It is only right and fair that we protect our fellow Mainers, both tenants and landlords from the significant repercussions that can stem from unattended or improperly tended mold problems in rented housing.

Thank you for your time,

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