

Testimony of Neta Vaught

Committee of the Whole & the Committee on Transportation & the Environment Public Hearing on [Bill 23-132](#), Indoor Mold Remediation Enforcement Amendment Act of 2019

December 8, 2019

Good afternoon, thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Neta Vaught, and I am resident of Ward 8. I live in Congress Park apartments with my children, Calvin, age 6, Drake, age 6, Shanti, age 12, Michael, age 15, and Nemiya, age 16. Calvin and Shanti both have asthma. Shanti has very bad allergies and has been hospitalized in the ICU twice in the past two months because of the environmental allergans in our apartment, especially the mold. Calvin has had to go to the emergency room many times because of his asthma being triggered by the mold in our apartment, and he has missed many days of school because of it.

Congress Park has been in the news because of our terrible housing conditions, including severe mold. The story was covered by WUSA is available here:

<https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/dc/moldy-se-dc-apartment/65-7ffc9ac9-ba28-4431-8f72-cf509a5a84f8>. The conditions in the property are terrible—the mold is everywhere and we have rats and the landlord has done nothing that fixes it. For example, in one neighbor’s apartment, they cut out the walls and left the walls open with rats coming in and out. DCRA has been out to the property, but nothing has changed. DCRA did cite them for some issues, but few of those repairs have been made and there has been no follow up. I also

have another neighbor who has 20% mold in her system, and now must use a breathing machine for the rest of her life. The impact of these terrible property conditions are real and we can't wait any longer.

I was in the hospital just last week with Shanti and Shanti's doctor wrote a letter stating that the conditions in the home are making her asthma so bad that we need to move, but I have no place to go and no way to move. We need the conditions to be fixed because I need safe place for my children to live. There is no immediate place that is safe for to go with my family.

This bill is needed because we need to have city inspectors who can look at mold. Right now, if DCRA does come out, they just walk by the mold. This was surprising to me, because I thought at least someone else in DC Government would help with mold, but I was shocked to learn that no one in DC Government will help with mold. I saw the landlord paint over the mold and use bleach to wipe off the mold so that they could pass the visual inspection that DCRA did.

Once I was connected with my lawyer at Children's Law Center, Children's Law Center got a mold inspector out. The mold inspector found areas in my apartment where the landlord had painted over mold that I did not even know about.

But, most tenants do not have someone to pay for the inspector and we need a government agency to test for mold and make sure that it is being repaired correctly. I fully support requiring DCRA inspectors to be licensed as mold inspectors. I also support DCRA fining the landlord if they do not make the repairs, but the fine needs be hefty to make sure that the landlord actually makes the repair and cares about the fine. There should be levels to the fines so that if the landlord does not make the repairs, there are increasing fines.

I am aware of another family whose child died after an asthma attack in her home related to the conditions in the home. It was only after the child died that the family was moved. We should not have to wait until our child dies to get help with our housing conditions.

Everyone tells me to be preventative with my childrens' health, to use less medication, but I have to use more medication and more steroids. How can I be preventative when we let landlords force us to live in these conditions? Thank you for listening to me today, and I hope that if we have government mold inspectors, other families will not have to have their children going back and forth to the hospital with asthma attacks related to the mold in their homes.