

From: [Anthony Bencivengo](#)
To: [Exhibits SHOUS](#)
Subject: Testimony for SB 954
Date: Monday, March 25, 2019 2:31:55 PM

To: Senate Committee on Housing
RE: Testimony on SB 954

Dear Senators,

Mold in a state as wet as Oregon is often perceived as a ubiquitous problem, best addressed through individual care in using bathroom fans, keeping one's home at the proper temperature, and cleaning any mold which does appear. Unfortunately, for many tenants these measures are not sufficient. Slumlords who neglect to fix problems of water intrusion and poor home design put tenants at risk of mold growth which can cause severe health impacts.

As a tenant union organizer, I have seen the impacts of unaddressed mold issues firsthand. One of the tenant leaders in the Holgate Manor Tenants Union, which launched one of the largest rent strikes in Oregon history last year to protest slum-like living conditions which their millionaire landlord left to fester even as he raised rents, is an elderly Ukrainian immigrant whose bathroom developed massive black mold growths due to water intrusion issues through the roof. Her husband would clean the mold off frequently, but it kept returning. He later died of cancer, and her doctor told her inhaling the mold spores may have played a role in worsening his condition.

Another tenant organizer who I work with began experiencing blinding migraines after a criminally poor roof-retiling job by her landlord resulted in unaddressed water intrusion. The migraines, which her doctor later attributed to the mold growth in the house, incapacitated her to the point that she could no longer maintain her work or school obligations. After she figured out what was going on, she called city inspectors and forced the landlord to address the mold issues. He gave her a no-cause eviction soon after, which she believes was retaliatory.

Slumlords like these need to face consequences for their actions, and should not be able to continue subjecting tenants to preventable mold problems. For this reason, I support SB 954 as a first step towards better acknowledging and addressing mold issues in rental housing.

However, the bill as written is a purely symbolic effort. In order to be effective, the bill must specify exactly what aspects of mold issues the proposed study will address, and what potential policy fixes it would consider. Or even better, we could skip the years-long process of writing a non-binding study and just go straight to the part where we pass needed protections for tenants.

Some suggestions for concrete policies which could protect tenants against slumlord-caused mold issues, and mold issues generally:

- Require that all landlords provide tenants with a state-approved information packet about how to identify, clean, and prevent mold growth

and about mold's health impacts. Many tenants lack basic knowledge about this topic, and more knowledge could significantly reduce mold problems. Tenant information requirements are already in place for houses which may have lead, and these can serve as a model for ensuring all tenants have the basic information we need to prevent and control mold growth.

- Mandate that any landlord who is cited by housing inspectors for housing code violations which exacerbate mold growth (example: water intrusion issues) warn new applicants about their past housing code violation citations. Slumlords like the ones I described above should not be able to continue evicting tenants who complain about mold growth and then subjecting new and unsuspecting tenants to the same poor living conditions.

- Require that all cities and/or counties establish housing health and safety codes, and mandatory inspection programs for rental housing

- Strengthen penalties for landlords who are found to be in violation of housing codes related to preventing mold growth (example: water intrusion issues) and who do not fix them within the period mandated by inspectors

- Expand grants and funding for lower-income homeowners and landlords who need to remodel their homes for weatherization, insulation, and to prevent water intrusion

- Strengthen protections against retaliation for tenants who report mold growth and other unaddressed health and safety issues in rental housing

Thank you for considering my testimony. I encourage you to reach out to me using the contact information below if you wish to discuss these ideas further.

Sincerely,

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