



## Ohio Environmental Council [ Action Fund ]

**Ohio House Health Committee  
Proponent Testimony - HB 251  
Chris Tavenor, Staff Attorney**

Chair Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and all members of the House Health Committee, I am Chris Tavenor, here testifying on behalf of the Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund. It is our central mission to enhance the health and environment of all Ohioans, and the need for clean air is an essential tenet of our work. We are proud to provide proponent testimony for HB 251, requiring the Director of Health to establish an indoor mold program for the entire state.

All Ohioans deserve clean air to breathe, no matter where they live, work, or play. Air quality in the home is of utmost importance, especially when we reflect on how important it has been for people to stay home over the past two years during the COVID-19 pandemic. If people cannot feel safe breathing the air in their home, they lack a basic necessity of life.

Indoor mold is particularly personal to me. My wife and I lived in an apartment complex before where mold has been a persistent problem in my space, due to no fault of my own. The apartment above me had leaky pipes, and water would regularly soak into our walls and ceiling. We didn't know the mold existed until paint and trimming began to peel from the wall. It gave us pause; we didn't know all the health risks of mold, but the maintenance team for the apartment complex made it very clear we should keep our cat far away.

Yet the mold persisted. The property management company had no legal obligation to root out the entire problem; they would simply patch the visible spots and call it a day.

According to the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, "individuals with chronic respiratory disease may have difficulty breathing, and people who are immunocompromised may be at increased risk for lung infection. A study conducted by NIEHS-funded scientists shows that mold exposure during the first year of life may increase the risk of childhood asthma."<sup>1</sup> In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a respiratory illness, indoor mold presents a particularly more complicated risk.

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<sup>1</sup>*Mold*, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, available at: <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/mold/index.cfm>

Ohioans deserve a concerted effort from the Ohio Department of Health focused on addressing issues related to indoor mold. House Bill 251 puts in place a program designed to educate Ohioans, and property owners, about the risks of indoor mold. It also requires property owners to disclose the existence of mold to future tenants. It is possible my property owner knew of the persistent mold issues in the apartment I was living in, and simply didn't tell me. No Ohioan deserves to be surprised by a potentially toxic mold growing in their walls.

Another important facet of House Bill 251 is its requirement for the indoor mold program to review technology or treatment techniques for mold identification and remediation that provide additional protections to public health and safety. Ensuring homeowners, commercial property owners, and residential property managers know the best techniques to clean up mold will benefit everyone, present and future residents alike.

Perhaps most importantly, though, is House Bill 251's requirement for a public awareness campaign, including educational material distribution. Many Ohioans likely live with mold in their homes right now, without knowing it is present. Their children, pets, and family members may be at risk to airborne mold all while amidst a respiratory pandemic. By distributing public education materials across the state, the Ohio Department of Health will immediately help Ohioans identify any problem areas and notify their property managers (or take action themselves, if it is a property they own).

As someone who has experienced the uncertainty of mold in their walls firsthand, I can tell you I would have appreciated this information from the state. I would have appreciated knowing what technology to suggest to my property manager for remediation.

Therefore, I reiterate the OEC Action Fund's support for House Bill 251. It creates a real tool for the Ohio Department of Health to educate Ohioans on mold while also protecting and informing residents about the existence of mold in the places they live and work.