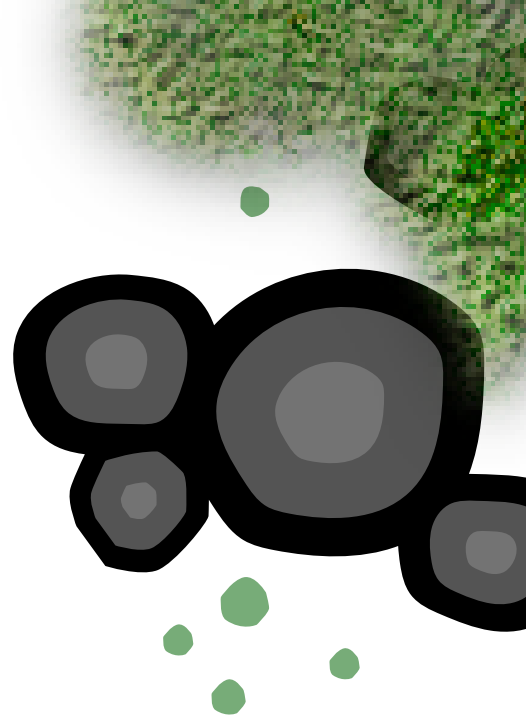


Holding Landlords Accountable for Mold Growth and Clean-Up

To: Washington State Legislators, Washington State Department of Health, Landlords of Whatcom County

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Policy Overview

RCW 59.18.060

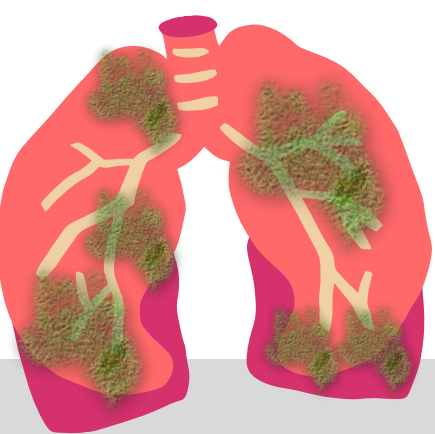
Lists the required duties of all landlords to meet, provide, and/or maintain while tenants are living on their property. Of the duties listed, landlords **are not** responsible for mold growth, but rather, the fixing of any pre-existing or new structural deficits that cause water damage or blocked air flow (1).

THE EXISTING LEGISLATION IS DANGEROUS & INSUFFICIENT. YOUR INACTION IS COSTING LIVES!

Problem Analysis

Low-income Whatcom County residents are being forced to live in conditions that increase their exposure to environmental hazards, compromising their health. The most notable problem is **mold toxicity**, which is linked to allergic rhinitis, acute bronchitis, asthma, and a number of other health outcomes (2, 3).

This problem persists primarily because **landlords lack accountability**, but also there is **weak legislation** that does not guarantee tenants access to safe, healthy housing. In Washington state, landlords are not responsible for mold growth, but they are responsible for pre-existing structural deficits including plumbing and roofing problems, which can cause mold growth (2). While landlords are failing to ensure maintenance occurs in a timely manner, there is no clear legal system of accountability that forces them to do so (4).



Social & Economic Impacts



- **47%** of U.S. residential buildings have dampness/mold (5)
- **15-20%** of economic costs of several diseases and symptoms are associated with indoor exposure to dampness and mold (1)
 - Nationally, these conditions cost individuals (5):
 - **\$3.7 billion/year** (Allergic Rhinitis)
 - **\$1.9 billion/year** (Acute Bronchitis)
 - **\$15.1 billion/year** (Asthma Morbidity)
- Other costs experienced by tenants that have yet to be quantified (1):
 - Hours of school missed
 - Hours of work missed
 - Number of migraines suffered
 - Jobs lost
 - Other healthcare expenses related to mold toxicity

Witness Testimonies from Whatcom County Residents

"I am a mother of two, living in low-income housing with mold toxicity. My **teen daughter** experiences migraines often, causing her to **miss a lot of school**. I have **lost my job** due to ongoing sickness."

"I am a mother of three. My **toddler suffers from migraines** and my **9-year-old** wakes up nearly every morning with **blood coming out of his ears**."



Risk Factors



13.0% of Whatcom County lives in **poverty**, where people of color make up majority of this demographic (6).

The most **vulnerable populations at risk** for experiencing symptoms include immunocompromised people, infants and children, elderly and those with asthma, allergies, breathing conditions (7).

As a result, **mold exposure** exacerbates existing allergic immune responses, autoimmune disorders, and Human Immunodeficiency Virus disease progression among these marginalized groups (3).

- Non-maleficence is violated because those most affected by landlord negligence live in **low-income** housing. These people have little power and privilege to speak up about their living conditions out of **fear of retaliation**, allowing landlords to be complacent with safety concerns.
- With our policy recommendations, accountability is shifted from tenants to landlords. Tenants are relieved of the burden of disease and cost, and healthy living conditions are ensured.

Ethics & Social Justice

Priority Policy Aims:

It is recommended that landlords immediately:

- (1) PROVIDE** tenants with the appropriate cleaning services for mold control, at the landlords' expense.
- (2) PROVIDE** tenants with a voucher for temporary relocation at a hotel, motel, or Airbnb during remediation.
- (3) PROVIDE** tenants with rent relief for the following month(s) until the mold is adequately cleaned.

References

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- 3.Kraft S, Buchenauer L, Polte T. Mold, Mycotoxins and a Dysregulated Immune System: A Combination of Concern? Int J Mol Sci. 2021;22(22):12269. doi:10.3390/ijms222212269
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