

GLOBAL INDOOR HEALTH NETWORK

WORKING TOGETHER FOR HEALTHY INDOOR ENVIRONMENTS
IN OUR HOMES, SCHOOLS AND BUSINESSES



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FEMA Changes Policy (Funds can now be used for mold remediation)

On December 6, 2022, FEMA announced over \$169 million in additional assistance has been provided to survivors because of a policy update which expanded home repair assistance to specifically address applicants with remediating disaster-caused mold growth. Because of the policy update, more than 111,000 additional applicants have been able to get assistance. (Read the article on page 8.)

Are you planning to buy new furniture? Read this first

Many furniture and home goods companies use a dangerous chemical called Dimethyl fumarate (DMF) to prevent mold growth.

DMF is a potent irritant and sensitizer, capable of causing acute and severe contact irritation following exposure to it. The symptoms typically comprise an itchy, scaling or papulovesicular rash, which is reddened and swollen. The areas affected are commonly the back, the posterior aspect of the legs and the arms, the genitals and the buttocks -- all of which come into contact with the furniture. *[Note: This is NOT an allergy or allergic reaction. It is a reaction to a chemical.]*

People can be exposed to DMF through these routes of exposure:

- Leather used to make furniture is often treated with DMF with the alleged purpose of reducing moisture and mold.
- DMF is also included in millions of desiccant packets/sachets (see a sample picture in the next column) that are included in leather goods, shoes, riding helmets, non-leather furniture, rugs, pillows, etc. These desiccant packets/sachets are made of breathable fabric and contain a white crystalline powder (DMF).
- DMF is released through vapors and infects/contaminates these items and can also contaminate other nearby furniture and household items and the clothing of the person who sits on the contaminated item.

In 1998, the European Union banned the manufacture of products with DMF, and imports of products with DMF have been banned since 2009.

(continued on page 2)

See *New furniture—Dimethyl fumarate* on page 2

Are you planning to buy new furniture? Read this first.

Continued from page 1.....

It is difficult to avoid DMF because products are not identified as containing the substance. However, sachets labelled "mould inhibitor" or "anti-mould" are likely to contain DMF and should not be touched.

Furniture stores and other companies will not tell you if they use DMF in their leather products or in the desiccant packets (sachets) they include with furniture, rugs pillows and other home goods.

WARNING: Furniture with DMF cannot be "cleaned."

The furniture stores will tell you to clean the sofa, recliner, etc. with leather cleaner. That will NOT work.

The only way to get rid of the contamination is to get rid of the furniture.

Even then, the chemical can linger in the air after the item has been removed and will contaminate nearby fabrics such as other furniture items in the same room and clothing worn by the person who sits on the contaminated item.

The most important step is to STOP THE EXPOSURE.

The contaminated item must be removed from the home. Keep in mind that nearby furniture/porous items could have absorbed some of the vapors, so you may need to get rid of those items too. Depending on the extent of the contamination, the affected person may have to leave their home for several days or weeks and have the house thoroughly cleaned and de-contaminated.

DMF was the cause of a major outbreak of contact dermatitis as a consequence of its use as an antifungal agent in leather products, particularly in furniture.

The widespread effects of this major outbreak for thousands of people in several countries generated the 'perfect storm' conditions that caused the DMF epidemic.

BUYER BEWARE!! You may not be able to find furniture in the U.S. that does not contain DMF. Don't buy new furniture. It's not worth the risk to you and your family.



Dimethyl fumarate (DMF) desiccant packet. This is one example, but there are many similar packets.

DMF should be banned in the U.S.

Outbreak of DMF-Contaminated Furniture Affected Thousands of People

There was an outbreak of furniture-related dermatitis in Finland, United Kingdom and France. In some cases, the rash was quite severe, resembling mycosis fungoides or septic infections (impetigo), and required hospitalisation.

The media referred to this outbreak as "toxic sofa dermatitis."

Thorough investigation led to the discovery that all patients had purchased leather furniture prior to developing the dermatitis.

DMF has also been implicated in foot / shoe dermatitis. In one case, the dermatitis started as an acute, sharply demarcated eczema that matched exactly to the contact area of the shoe exposure. The patient had worn a pair of new shoes for approximately 8 hours. The high concentration of DMF produced an irritant contact dermatitis.

Items such as shoes that have been in a box with DMF sachets should be left for several months in the open air before the level of DMF can be considered harmless. Unfortunately, in some shoes, DMF may have been incorporated into the structure of the shoe and the evaporation of DMF to reach safe levels may be years instead of months.

See *It's hush money (military family)* on page 3

'It's hush money.' Military Family Rejects \$5k Settlement Over Mold, Sewage Problems at Their Home

For the last six months, Breanna Bragg's family has been displaced because of problems with mold and sewage at their Fort Belvoir home in Virginia.

Bragg's husband is in the Army, and they have two kids ages 2 and 7.

We obtained records showing multiple inspections that found "actual mold growth" in the bathrooms and dining room.

In October, an inspector determined the home was "uninhabitable due to cross-contamination of suspected fungal growth, the presence of black water (sewage) in the home, and pest control."

Bragg said the hardest part was when her 7-year-old daughter said she didn't want to be at home anymore.

"She said, you know, 'mommy, school is fun because school is my safe place now because home isn't safe.' Our home ... has mold everywhere and as a mom, that broke me," said Bragg.

The Braggs were placed in a temporary home while repairs were made to their home.

After going through the dispute resolution process, Bragg said her family rejected a settlement offer that would have required them to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) prohibiting them from discussing their experience.

We obtained a copy of an unconditional release agreement from the Michaels Organization, which operates housing on Fort Belvoir, which said the parties shall not discuss "the alleged claims or make negative statements related to or concerning Fort Belvoir housing or military housing in general, to the public (including but not limited to current, future, or former residents at Fort Belvoir), the press, on social media, or with any other media outlet."



'It's hush money.' Military Family Rejects \$5k Settlement Over Mold, Sewage Problems at Their Home (continued)

"It's hush money," said Bragg. "It's, we put you in a moldy and unsafe house. If you want us to remediate your things, take pennies and shut up."

A spokesperson for the Army Installation Management Command said the Army is focused on maintaining "consistent communication and support for the Braggs as they move to their next duty station."

The Army also said if a tenant is unsatisfied with the result of a formal dispute resolution process, they can pursue litigation through the civil court system.

We've told you how the Braggs' experience is not an isolated case.

The Michaels Organization is being sued by other residents over similar housing problems.

It's also not the only housing company that operates homes on military bases that has been under fire.

A bipartisan Senate investigation exposed mistreatment at homes run by other private companies on bases in Georgia and Texas.

"I blame the Army at this point," said Bragg. "You're allowing the housing company to do what they've done."

Read the [article](#).

See *Mum's fears...damp, mouldy house* on page 4

Mum's Fears as Children Fall Ill in Damp, Mouldy House with Leak Dripping into Bedroom (U.K.)

A mum is living in fear with black mould and constant damp making her children ill.

Nicole Dutton, 31, said she is living in squalid conditions with her daughters Ava, nine, Annie, five, and Arla, three.

A leak has been dripping into Annie's bedroom and she was recently rushed to hospital with asthma.

Nicole is more worried than ever following the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak in Rochdale after a housing association failed to tackle black mould at his home.

She has been plagued with damp and mould since moving into her apartment seven months ago in Widnes, Cheshire.

And the mum said Halton Housing has not taken enough action to address the situation.

"There is a leak dripping directly into my five-year-old's room where she sleeps," she said.

"I was in hospital with her the other day because of her asthma, all the kids have bad chests and colds all the time," she told the Liverpool Echo.

The wallpaper in one room of Nicole's flat has almost entirely come away from the wall while black mould lines her windows and patches of damp are spread across the ceiling.

"There is black mould everywhere and one of the walls is literally coming apart," Nicole said.

"My hallway carpets are damp all the time. I am putting the heating on all the time just to try and keep the place a bit warm but I can't afford it."

The mum said she has tried to contact Halton Housing multiple times but has not had the problems fixed.



Mum's Fears as Children Fall Ill in Damp, Mouldy House with Leak Dripping into Bedroom (continued)

She said: "I don't want to move because my kids are settled here but I just want them to come out and make repairs to the flat."

"A roofer did come out and said the place was riddled with damp and black mould."

Halton Housing claimed they were only made aware of the situation at the end of November and have since started repair work.

A spokesperson said: "Since we were made aware of this issue by the customer on November 29, we visited the property with a contractor on November 30 to assess the work required, and remedial work started on December 2."

"The customer's wellbeing remains our priority."

Parents across the UK are concerned of mould following the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab.

Nicole said: "I didn't know about the little boy in Rochdale until I saw it two days ago when my little girl was in hospital."

"It made me so worried with my kids living in a damp, mouldy house."

Read the [article](#).

Pregnant Woman Living in Mould-Infested Flat (U.K.)

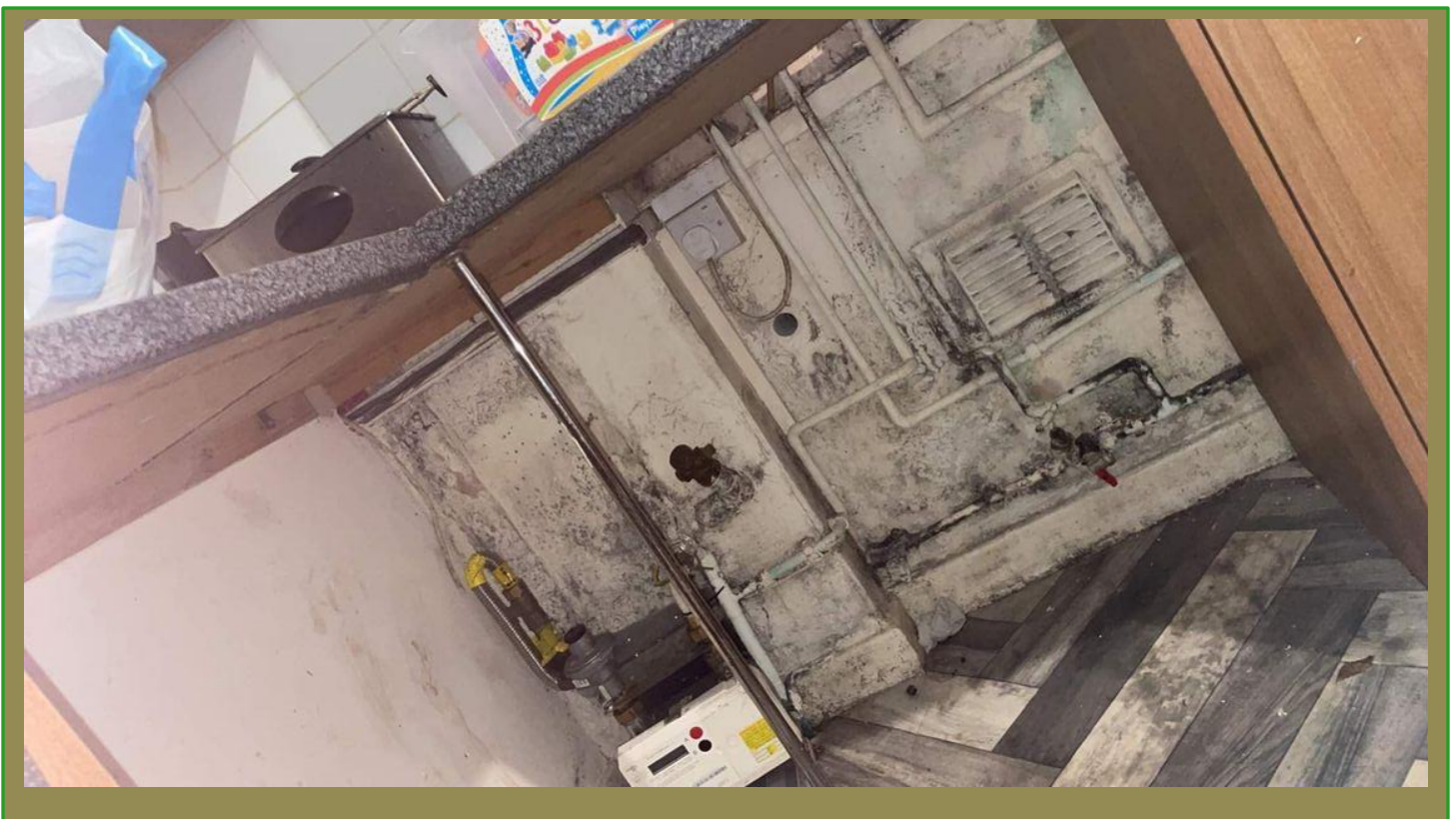
A pregnant woman claims she has reached breaking point dealing with a black mould issue in her home.

Jess first spotted the signs of black mould two years ago, when it appeared in the corners of the walls and behind her bed, but she said it has now become unbearable.

She claims she has made numerous attempts to request action from Hafod Housing Association which manages the property, but she claims hardly anything had been done in all the time she has lived there to help solve the problems.

The mould has spread into every room of the house now. She said: "It all started a couple of months after I just moved in, in March 2020. It's now on my furniture, all in my carpet, all on my daughter's toys and everything. It's all up the walls, my bed and it's on every wall in every room... it's also in my daughter's room where there was a wardrobe that I've now had to chuck out because there was loads on it."

Read the [article](#).



Man's Nightmare Living Inside Mould-Infested Dorchester Flat (U.K.)

A disabled man has described the nightmare of living within a mould-infested flat which he believes should be knocked down and rebuilt. Nicholas Webster has lived in social housing with his mother in Dorchester for nearly nine years and has endured years of problems with what he believes is rising damp and mould growing in his home.

The 35-year-old has suffered from breathing issues and rashes from mould in his bedroom and fears it could cause him to become seriously ill and potentially kill him. Further mould is present in their bathroom and his mother's bedroom.

The mould and damp within the ground floor flat is so severe that Nicholas has seen mould grow on his clothing, shoes, furniture, bed frames, carpets and personal belongings.

Magna Housing, who owns the property, are aware of Nicholas' concerns and say they will work with him and his mother to resolve the problematic mould.

Speaking about his experience within the flat, Nicholas told Dorset Live that he and his mother have struggled with the persistent mould and previous tenants say the issue has been there for around 20 years.

He said: "Magna Housing say it's condensation and a ventilation issue but that's clearly not the case because I follow their guidelines to a tee and they have repainted the walls.

"They have taken out the cavity insulation, which has made the room even colder and more of a problem to warm up the room. They have scrubbed the mould off before a couple of times and we painted it with supposedly mould repellents, but that obviously hasn't worked.

"I try to clean it as much as possible. It spreads across the carpet and comes in from the concrete underneath. So, it is problematic."

The mould and damp within the ground floor flat is so severe that Nicholas has seen mould grow on his clothing, shoes, furniture, bed frames, carpets and personal belongings.

"In my opinion, this entire block should be completely demolished. It is not fit for purpose."

Man's Nightmare Living Inside Mould-Infested Dorchester Flat (U.K.)—cont'd

There is a thick smell of damp and mould within Nicholas' room, with mould growing in two corners of his bedroom, near the radiator, windows and on the wall. Nicholas remarked that Magna Housing has installed an air tech dry air pump and ventilation fans which have reduced mould in the lounge and his mother's bedroom, but mould and damp remain in his bedroom and bathroom.

He said: "When I'm in my bedroom, my coughing gets really bad and that's when I'm just sitting on the bed on my laptop. I start coughing quite a bit and find it difficult to breathe.

I come into the lounge most of the time to ease the problem. It's also caused rashes on my face.

Ever since I've moved in, I've had a lot more rashes appear on my body, especially on my face.

He described his living conditions as a "nightmare" and believed that Magna should either resolve the mould problem, call in independent inspectors or demolish and rebuild the block of flats.

Nicholas said: "In my opinion, this entire block should be completely demolished. It is not fit for purpose."

"My neighbours upstairs have also had issues. My next-door ground-level neighbours have had severe issues and I've had severe issues.

Read the [article](#).

Florida Atlantic University – Ongoing Lawsuit Regarding Mold in Housing

The UP has been covering mold in the dorms since 2017. Some students say they are getting sick and think the university is neglecting the issue.

Mold has been a common complaint among students who live on campus. Benjamin Maggio once lived in Glades Park Towers, and the Boca Raton native is now mired in a years-long lawsuit alleging the university failed to respond to his concerns — to the detriment of his health.

Maggio is suing Florida Atlantic University because of what his doctor says will be “lifelong medical issues due to mold in his dorm” in the 2017-18 school year. Maggio, who is currently enrolled in online classes, filed the lawsuit on Nov. 17, 2019.

Maggio claims the university neglected his health after he and his mother repeatedly reported mold to the Department of Housing and Residential Education (HRE). His prolonged exposure to mold caused his health to deteriorate, his attorneys claim, and he will need medical care for the rest of his life.

The lawsuit states Maggio noticed mold growing in his dorm bathroom in October 2017 and contacted HRE on two separate occasions to report it. He claims the university did nothing until his mother contacted them in February 2018.

When contacted for comment, HRE’s contracts and assignments coordinator Michelle Olearczyk directed the UP to contact Joshua Glanzer, the university’s associate Vice President of Media Relations.

FAU spokesperson Lisa Metcalf declined to comment citing pending litigation.

According to a March 2018 work order, maintenance staff used bleach to “remove” the mold and Kilz Primer to “cover” the mold. *[GIHN Note: Bleach should never be used on mold.]*

The UP requested several work orders involving mold from the university, but did not receive them by time of publication.



Florida Atlantic University – Ongoing Lawsuit Regarding Mold in Housing (cont’d)

According to a timeline Benjamin Maggio’s mother provided, he relapsed after a visit to the Office of Equity and Inclusion.

“Right when March of 2018 happened, I was losing the ability to walk. It became a very physical thing. I lost a pretty dramatic amount of weight. I couldn’t walk again until September of 2018,” Benjamin Maggio said.

Benjamin Maggio developed symptoms that will affect him for the rest of his life. He relapses whenever he comes in contact with mold, which makes routine activities like visiting a theater or restaurant difficult.

The court proceedings are set to take place in March 2023.

Kennedy Koller, a student living in Heritage Park Towers (HPT), believes mold in her dorm has caused her to be sick since August. She is currently experiencing respiratory issues.

The RA claimed to have seen housing officials mock the presence of mold in the dorms.

“I have seen higher ups laugh about it, which is kind of sad. It’s just always written off,” said the RA.

Read the [article](#).

See *FEMA changes policies* on page 8

FEMA Changes Policy That Kept Thousands of Black Families from Receiving Disaster Aid

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is ending a policy that had prevented many Black families in the rural South from getting help after natural disasters. The agency announced Thursday that it will no longer require disaster survivors living on inherited land to prove they own their homes before they can get help rebuilding.

The change follows a July report from The Washington Post that detailed how FEMA was regularly denying help to Black families living on land passed down since a generation after slavery.

For years, FEMA has required applicants for disaster aid to provide a deed or other formal proof of homeownership. The agency said this was necessary to prevent fraud. But the policy cut off thousands of Southern families seeking grants for repairs after disasters destroyed their homes.

More than a third of Black-owned land in the South is passed down informally. Land handed down in such a manner becomes heirs' property, a type of ownership in which families hold property collectively.

It's a practice that dates back to the Jim Crow era, when Black people were subject to what the Department of Agriculture describes as a "well-documented" system of discrimination, including exclusion from loans and swindles by officials.

Families living on heirs' property will now be allowed to self-certify that they own their homes. FEMA will also accept letters from local officials and bills for home repairs as proof of ownership.

"As recently documented by The Washington Post, FEMA's regulations and procedures regarding property title have tended to have unfortunate disparate effects on Black homeowners," the senators wrote.

Congress is working on legislation to make this change a part of federal law. If their legislation passes, it would require FEMA to reopen cases going back several years.

Read the [article](#).

FEMA will now provide funds for mold remediation.

Prior to this policy change, FEMA funds were NOT provided for mold remediation for disaster-caused mold growth.

FEMA to Provide \$169 Million to Disaster Survivors for Mold Remediation

On December 6, 2022, FEMA announced over \$169 million in additional assistance has been provided to survivors because of a policy update which expanded home repair assistance to specifically address applicants with remediating disaster-caused mold growth. Because of the policy update, more than 111,000 additional applicants have been able to get assistance.

In August 2021, under the leadership of FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell, the agency implemented these policy changes to help simplify the disaster assistance process and increase equity and accessibility for all disaster survivors.

Prior to the policy change, eligible applicants were able to receive assistance to clean and sanitize water-damaged property to prevent mold growth, but those funds weren't provided for mold remediation from the disaster.

"Flooding can lead to dangerous mold growth, creating challenges for residents to remain in their homes after a disaster and putting their health and safety at risk," said Administrator Criswell. "By expanding Home Repair Assistance so all residents, including those from low-income and underserved communities, can better access this critical resource, FEMA is putting people first and reducing the likelihood of additional damage to affected homes."

As a result of this initiative, more than \$17 million in mold remediation assistance has gone to survivors of Hurricane Ian and more than \$3.5 million to survivors of Hurricane Fiona. Read the [article](#).

Family of Six Trapped in 'Nightmare' Mould-Infested Council Flat (U.K.)

A family has told how they have been trapped living in their council flat for the last five years that is riddled with mould and is so damp they have had to rip up the carpets.

Sara Martin, 42, and her partner Alistair Stuart, 59, initially moved into the ground floor property in West Pilton, Edinburgh, nine years ago and said they have been dealing with the issues for nearly a decade.

The family of six have now seen multiple investigations and surveys carried out into the problem of the dampness and black mould, but have claimed they have been given no long-term solution.

The family's despair comes as Britain's 'mould epidemic' is worsened by the cost-of-living crisis, which sees millions of renters battling infestations in their home.

Raising children inside the ground floor flat they are living in, the mother-of-four said the conditions have worsened their asthma, as well as breaking their beds and spreading into their clothes.

She added: 'It's horrendous, we've had three housing inspectors, two damp-proof surveys done and they just don't want to do anything about it.'

'Four and a half years ago we got decanted to a two-bedroom flat so they could do insulation in the walls which we were told by the inspector would be brick, but they just seemed to do a whitewash and put plasterboard over it and within two or three months it was starting to come back through.'

'It's just getting worse. Since I've had the insulation done, I've done everything, cleaned, used the washes and the solutions.'

'We have towels on our windows as well as the dehumidifiers which are full every couple of hours, and even with the towels it's constantly dripping.'

'It's in every room in the house.'



Family of Six Trapped in 'Nightmare' Mould-Infested Council Flat (U.K.)—cont'd

Forced to pull up the majority of their carpets due to the damp, the family claim to have also experienced a worsening in their health in recent years, with almost all of the children now suffering from asthma.

Ms. Martin added: 'Since I moved in my son has developed asthma, my two older daughters had asthma before but it's gotten worse and they're on stronger steroids and inhalers.'

'I've had pneumonia in the summer in this house and my partner now needs an x-ray on his lungs because the doctor thinks they don't sound right.'

It's that bad that my son has a divan bed that's collapsed with black mould and we had to get rid of bean bags because the carpet was soaking.

Recently we had to pull the carpets out because my daughter's bed collapsed underneath her and she's only four. Read the [article](#).

Mold, Mushrooms and Leaks at Huntington Village (Georgia)

A resident of Warner Robins says she's fed up with substandard conditions at her rental home.

Many residents were scared to speak out about the problems they claim they are experiencing, but one of them says she feels no choice but to make her concerns public.

"People aren't doing the maintenance calls. They aren't coming out to take care of the mold," says Julia Lawrence.

The mold isn't the only problem that residents at Huntington Village Homes say they have been experiencing.

A former employee who wishes to remain anonymous says the list of problems goes on and on.

"The living conditions that they were in. Mold getting ignored, serious pest control issues, mushrooms in houses, worms in houses, leaks not being taken care of," says a former employee.

"We actually called about the mushrooms two to three weeks before and then this guy came out that the toilet was leaking so badly that we had to get somebody to come to fix it and he didn't even know that we had called about the mushrooms," says Lawrence.

Lawrence also says that sometimes, they have moldy water or no water at all.

"Residents have been complaining for months. Some of them even years. With the amount of money they pay, they shouldn't have to worry about their health and their homes because they're being ignored. Environmental teams should come out there. Something needs to be done", says Lawrence.

Lawrence says she believes corporate greed is behind the ignored housing concerns.

Read the [article](#).



Class Action Lawsuit Filed Over Branford Manor Mold Complaints

A group of Branford Manor residents, citing "dangerous and unlivable conditions," filed a class action lawsuit Friday in New London Superior Court against the owner of the federally subsidized housing complex.

"Over 70% of the Branford Manor buildings are infested with mold and have other health and safety issues," Attorney Amity L. Arscott of Embry Neusner Arscott & Shafner, LLC in Groton said in a statement Friday afternoon announcing the lawsuit.

"Residents, most of whom are families with children, have been displaced, have physical illnesses and injuries, and are distressed from living in unsafe and unlivable conditions. Related (the owner) promised to improve the living conditions when they purchased the property in 2017. Instead, they made conditions worse, and the residents are suffering."

Arscott, who represents more than 100 Branford Manor families, and Attorney David N. Rosen of New Haven filed the lawsuit against the companies that own and manage the roughly 440-unit complex: Branford Manor Preservation, LP; Branford Manor Preservation GP, LLC; Related Affordable, LLC; and Related Management Corporation.

Read the [article](#).

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