

UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
Joint Subcommittee on Personnel & Readiness and Management Support

**To receive testimony on the current condition of the Military Housing
Privatization Initiative**

Panel 1

Family Members of Military Spouses
Statements for the Record

Family Member #1

Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing.

I am _____, the proud spouse of a Marine of 11 years, a passionate military family advocate, and founder of the nonprofit _____. I'm currently a finance professional and former police officer, and have a bachelor's in Public Administration and am working toward a master's degree.

In many ways, I am like every other military spouse. We are at our fourth duty station and are anticipating a geo-back tour in the fall. For the next three years, my husband will serve away from our family. Our three children have only known their father preparing for or deploying to war – a war that has endured 18 long years.

I am here today on behalf of military families of every branch and rank. We ask that you act on our testimony and ensure military families receive safe, habitable, and functional housing and a better, more accountable way to resolve problems that arise.

I first became aware of the crisis-level military housing issues at Keesler Air Force Base where termites fell out of light fixtures into our beds. Later, at Camp Pendleton, we lived with pervasive mold issues and unjustifiable move-out charges. At Keesler, the housing office staff told me, "Termites in your home are to be expected because of the region." At Camp Pendleton, we were inexplicably charged almost \$700 for carpet replacement. The housing rep used a black light and moisture stick to find stains unseen by the naked eye. When I disputed the validity of these charges, I found no path to resolution with the housing company, Camp Pendleton, or with my husband's former command. In the end, various agencies and local attorneys advised us that military families living on the bases are essentially powerless in these disputes.

During my two years of research and advocacy, I received hundreds of reports from military families of mold growth, rodent and pest infestations, moisture intrusion, lead and asbestos

exposures, radon concerns, base contamination, and cancer clusters in their housing. All of this was too often compounded by defensive, sometimes abusive housing staff.

With other military families, I have witnessed peeling lead paint inside and outside of the homes at Fort Belvoir. I have felt the helplessness of a fellow Marine spouse as she held her new baby and sobbed while we stood under a collapsing, moldy ceiling in her home at Camp Lejeune. I listened in horror as families at Camp Pendleton tell of mice eating through pacifiers in their babies' cribs and electrical outlets catching fire due to wiring issues. I've crawled into an attic at Keesler Air Force base and measured the moisture intrusion from a roof leak. And I've been to the town halls where families were dismissed and feared retaliation for reporting their concerns.

Today you will hear from the corporate housing company executives testifying that they were unaware of these problems and that their own surveys show they are fulfilling the terms of their government contracts. They, and some of those in command, also will say many families are not reporting housing issues through "official channels." That's just not accurate, in my experience and in those of many other families. In fact, that's what military families do: we follow the rules.

Until recent media reports and today's hearing, our efforts to fight for safe housing were too often met with intimidation, personal attacks, and strategic attempts to discredit us and silence our voices. We are appalled by this response.

But, looking ahead, we offer three recommendations to address the military housing crisis:

- Amend or cancel the 50-year privatized contracts to allow for competition, proper oversight, and accountability.
- Provide a clear and accessible path to administrative or legal recourse, when necessary.
- As with civilian counterparts, military families should be able to withhold their basic housing allowances until their homes are safe and habitable.

Military families understand that quality housing does not mean entitlement to elegant mansions. We simply ask for homes free of mold, pests, lead, and other hazards. We expect safe homes free from the stressors of deployments, work-ups, training, and the day-to-day military service. As parents, we want safe places for our children to sleep at night.

Thank you for your time today and commitment to resolving the military housing crisis. We look forward to working with you to create solutions. As military families we do our part, we ask that those who are paid to support us do theirs.

Family Member #2

My name is _____, an Army spouse of 9 years, and we are currently stationed at Ft. Meade in Maryland. My husband is a Sergeant First Class and we have 2 children.

We are enrolled in the Department of Defense's Exceptional Family Member Program, which means the Department helps us with adaptive housing, proper medical care, and educational needs for our daughter who has a genetic condition that causes both physical and educational issues. While not a perfect system, we are grateful for the E-F-M program as it allows my spouse to train and deploy without worrying about our safety and welfare at home.

5 Months before we moved to Fort Meade, we contacted the Corvias housing staff to select a house. Due to our daughter's medical condition, we needed and requested a single-story home without stairs. We verbally made the housing staff aware over the phone, that our daughter has knee problems associated with her medical condition. Corvias assured us that since we were placed on the waitlist five months prior to our report date, they would have plenty of time to accommodate our request. After selecting from the choices that were provided by the housing staff, Corvias committed to providing us a single-story home that we selected. We packed for our move, had our household goods delivery set up, confident that the house we selected would accommodate us and our special needs and be ready upon our arrival.

Five days before our move from Fort Gordon, 600-hundred miles away, we were told that the home we had secured with a lease was no longer available. The explanation we were given from Corvias was that the current family in the home was no longer moving out in time, and we now only had one option to choose for housing.

It was the height of moving season, known as P-C-S. With no time left, we decided to take the only house Corvias offered that would be available upon arrival. We accepted the multi-story townhome on the base, rather than risk not having any housing at all. This meant that when our daughter dislocated her knee or when she requires surgery on her knee again, she has to go up and down the stairs to get to her room.

Before we moved into housing we were quoted a fixed rate rent for the house. Upon arrival we were given a slightly higher rate, but we felt powerless in arguing the difference in rent prices. A few months later Corvias claimed they had miscalculated their own move in costs and were demanding we pay them an additional 14 dollars, even though this was their own mistake.

In January when the housing allowance pay was adjusted, Corvias also took it upon themselves to disregard our fixed "market rate" lease and increased our pay deduction by 177 dollars without our consent or informing us. Once we provided them proof of our market rate addendum attached to the lease, we were given the burden of proof in this matter. Shortly after correcting the housing allotment, Corvias staff did inform us they will increase our rent again in July, despite their initial promise to continue to renew the lease at a market rate.

Shortly after moving in, we began to notice issues with the home: the linoleum floor around the first-level toilet started to get large black matter visible underneath and it was growing. After the first work order, Corvias did not send any workers or inspectors so we submitted a second work

order, Housing finally came to the house after an unexplained two week delay. They took out the toilet and placed it in our laundry room, where it sat for two days. They also pulled up the bathroom floor and exposed the house to extensive black mold for the next two days. Maintenance did not properly clean the concrete below, and just placed new linoleum over the mold covered concrete. The contractors Corvias sent to our home to repair the bathroom even stated that this work they had completed was just a band-aid.

Shortly after the first floor bathroom issue was addressed, we began noticing issues with the second floor bathroom. Mold was growing out of the wall of the shower. When Corvias maintenance came to address our work order for this, they told us, and this is a direct quote, “let the mold just fall out. If we seal the area, the moisture would be trapped inside” Meanwhile, the area we can see behind the shower wall is black and actively growing mold because it continues to get wet with every shower.

We requested an air quality check from housing due to our daughter’s frequent nosebleeds, and the bathroom mold issues we have encountered. Corvias, however, would not commit to checking our air quality, and it has been more than two weeks since we have heard from the housing office. Meanwhile, we are still living in these conditions.

Our story is not unique, nor is it the worst. Almost 17-thousand military families responded to a survey by the Military Family Advisory Network, with testimonials of unhealthy living conditions in privatized housing on military bases. And many more were given to other military family nonprofits.

Thank you, Senators for the opportunity to testify, and for addressing the serious issues of the health, safety and welfare of military families.

Family Member #3

Awaiting Statement for the Record.

Family Member #4

My husband is currently active duty Air Force stationed at Tinker AFB in Oklahoma. We lived on base in privatized housing managed by Balfour Beatty. We had numerous ongoing issues in our home including maintenance issues that were neglected over the less than two years we lived there which ultimately resulted in making my family very sick. Our housing company has known about these issues for years and are taking advantage of these young military families who are not educated on how to properly treat mold and the health effects it causes. They are covering up, painting over mold, threatening military members with their command, using scare tactics and intimidation, lying to us and making the problems worse. And now, it is out of control. They have been banking on the fact that we would likely PCS to another base before what they covered up would reappear. On the surface, these homes appear to be flawless. But inside the walls tell a different story.

On August 19, 2018 after lengthy and constant illnesses, my husband and I began to uncover the real cause of all of our symptoms. I spent the weekend deep cleaning because we had all been so sick, for so long. The utility room in our home was also my children’s play room where they played

daily. In the utility room, I moved their small card table that was leaning up against the wall. The wall was solid black. I never thought mold. I thought it was residue from the padded side of their table. I wiped it off and continued cleaning. The symptoms we had, included: constant sore throats, nose bleeds, brain fog, blurred vision, numbness, fatigue, debilitating headaches, even the 4 year olds complained daily of these headaches along with dizziness. Knowing headaches are not normal for a child of that age, it even caused me to worry that my they might have cancer. One of my twins suffered numerous times from respiratory distress that required emergency room attention.

On Monday, August the 20th, we called maintenance to repair a leak in our utility room. This was the ninth leak we had had in less than a year and a half. Maintenance came, cut a large hole in the sheetrock and repaired the leak. Upon completion, he asked if we wanted the hole repaired or if we were ok to leave this large hole in our wall. There were numerous large discolored spots on the same wall. We asked if those were from that same leak, he said no. He then told us he wanted to go out and look at our mechanical room which is directly behind the utility room. This is a locked room attached to our homes that we were not allowed access to by housing. I told my husband to follow him. He walked up behind him and overheard a frantic phone conversation between he and the housing office about how our mechanical room needed to be replaced immediately!

When he noticed my husband standing behind him, he frantically began saying, "You cannot be in here! I am not allowed to let you in this room!" My husband insisted that because we pay for this house that he was coming in! Upon entering, he saw black mold covering the walls, floor to ceiling. He immediately called housing maintenance. The housing office told him they had known about the mold since March and had been "treating it" by scrubbing it with bleach and water. When he asked why we were not notified, she stated that she assumed the technicians had told us. We have verified with numerous experts that this process is only acceptable when the area of focus is very small and NEVER use bleach on a porous surface. Doing this only feeds the mold, causing it to grow faster, spread and multiply. We have shared this information with the housing company numerous times, to this day, they continue to use this process. The next morning, my husband and his command met with our military housing liaison and our local housing community manager at our home. We were told by the manager that they had actually been documenting the mold since February and had she known how bad the room was, we would not have been allowed to continue living there. We told her we wanted mold testing done by a company of our choosing before any remediation began. That was refused. One week later, this manager no longer worked for the company.

Balfour Beatty then moved our family into a Patriot Home. These are homes used to temporarily house families while work is being done to their own homes. We were told it had no mold, that it was clean and safe. The first day we were there, we found mold. The home was filthy, dirt on the floors, stains on the couch and carpets and bugs in the drawers in the kitchen. There were leaks in the patriot home. Water pouring into a light fixture in the ceiling from an upstairs bathroom. We called housing, they came and cut a 2 x 2 inch square in the ceiling and left it causing water to then pour into the floor of the utility room instead of into the light fixture. We began to feel worse in this home and we requested to be moved to a hotel. Initially, housing would only commit to one night at a time. Leaving us each night to wonder where we would go the next day and the next night after that, with 5 children. We had to borrow a credit card from my parents so that we at least had the security of a roof over our heads for more than one night at a time. Eventually, the company

agreed to go back and pay for those and finally upon hiring an attorney, we were extended in the hotel for over two months. All total, we were out of our home for approximately 3 months with 5 children spending approximately 80 days in a hotel costing Balfour Beatty \$17,000.

We had to hire our own mold company to come test the mold at our home. The test results showed all 5 of the toxic molds present inside our home. We believe the mold was contained to our utility room and maintenance closet initially. Air samples of our living room were clean. We had to pay out of pocket to see a doctor in Midwest City who specializes in toxic mold exposure. We tested positive for the presence of mycotoxins in our bodies.

Housing subcontracted a company to “remediate” the mold. We know for a fact that the remediation was done improperly. Vents were not covered and contaminated items that were in the utility room were put inside my garage as well as my kitchen and living room. They did not take walls out that should have been taken out and they did not remove boards that had mold growing on them between the walls. When this nightmare started for us, my husband revoked the authorization we had given them to enter our home without permission and signed that they were no longer allowed to enter without notifying us. We caught them in our home on numerous occasions, they left our home unlocked for lengthy periods of time and gave the keys to our home to outside contractors without them being present or us being notified. They performed several air sample tests without telling us but we found them in our home doing this twice.

We have requested in writing the results for those tests and they refused to give them to us. We waited for 2 weeks, with nothing being done to our home. We paid to have testing done again after they completed their work. Our testing shows the situation was far worse now than it was to begin with. We had Stachybotrys in our air samples in our living room that were only present in tape samples in our utility room and mechanical room previously. The last air sample was done on 10-16-18 by a company hired by the company housing had subcontracted to do the remediation. This is a huge conflict of interest. Housing sent us their final report which showed Stachybotrys present in a bedroom. Despite this, they scheduled a final walk through of the house stating it was safe for us to move back in to. We went through the house with the project manager for Balfour Beatty and pointed out all of the mold they left during remediation and informed him that we had pictures and videos proving it had not been remediated properly and we would not be taking possession of the home back.

I found out just two days ago, Balfour Beatty has moved another family into this contaminated home. Over the next week, we began to move out. We were only able to save metal and glass items from our home. I was forced to part with antiques given to me by my grandparents, as well as keepsake items from my children because they had all been contaminated with mold spores due to improper remediation. We turned in a 7 day written notice to terminate our lease based on it being uninhabitable on November 15th but Balfour Beatty continued to withhold our BAH for another month. They sent us a letter through our attorney charging us \$1100.00 in fees (we never received an itemized statement of those charges) and that they would trade us a month of BAH for all our inconveniences and we could then call it even. We did not accept this offer.

We will likely suffer from the effects of this for the rest of our lives. Physically, financially, emotionally and mentally. My family went from zero to \$40,000.00 in debt in a 3 month period. I

suffer daily from chronic breathing issues and blurred vision due to the mold in my brain. We take an enormous amount of binders, supplements, and prescriptions daily, with no end in sight. It didn't have to be this way. Our military families do not deserve this after all the sacrifices they make. It is criminal. It is unbelievable the extent of this cover up.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify.