



Protecting the Health of Our Military in Privatized Housing With Michael Rubino & Kristina Baehr

SPEAKERS

Kendra Seymour, Michael Rubino, Kristina Baehr

KB

Kristina Baehr

00:00

Developmental delays, memory loss, processing speed, confusion. Do you want the guy with the button the nuclear arsenal to have slow processing speed and short-term memory loss? That is what is actually happening right now. These bases are incredibly strategic for our country, and we have men and women in uniform in those houses, and we are poisoning them and causing brain damage. That is not safe. That's not safe for all of us.

KS

Kendra Seymour

00:43

Hello everyone, and welcome back to Your Indoor Air Podcast brought to you by Change The Air Foundation. My name is Kendra Seymour. Now today, you know, I'm speaking to you as someone who cares deeply about safe housing and healthy indoor environments, obviously, but this episode, I think, is going to hit especially hard. We're going to be talking about what happens when the families who protect our country are forced to live in homes that are making them sick. So this is a story about mold, yes, but it's also story about broken promises and ignored warnings and a housing crisis unfolding behind the gates of US military bases, and whether you've ever stepped foot on base or not, this issue affects you, and it demands everyone's attention, in my opinion. So before we jump in and I introduce our guests, I want to set the stage with some critical context for you. I think it's important as listeners, you have some background so you can understand how big this problem really is. Today, there are nearly 700,000 service members and their families who live in privatized military housing across the United States. So what does that mean? It means that military homes aren't managed by the military or government. They're managed by private companies. So there are 14 private companies who own and operate 99% of

these homes, and they oversee 78 developments through long term contracts. Many of these contracts lasting as long as 50 years. So I do want to just add one more point of context for the purposes of this interview. When we say military housing, we're going to be talking about single family homes where military families live, which is different than the barracks for unaccompanied service members. Although barracks on their own have issues as well. So these homes that our military families live in are supposed to be safe places to raise children and recover between deployments, but for decades, these families have reported widespread and dangerous conditions. We're talking toxic mold and water damage, lead exposure, pest infestation, sewage backups and so much more. So despite years of complaints and investigations and even congressional attention, the system remains broken, and these families continue to suffer. So to help us tackle this topic, I am so excited to welcome Kristina Baehr and Michael Rubino. Thank you both so much for being here.

MR

Michael Rubino

02:57

Thank you for having us.

KS

Kendra Seymour

02:58

So, I want to tell you a little bit about each of our guests before we jump in. Kristina, she's a powerhouse. She is a national trial lawyer who represents sick people against the companies that make them sick, and she founded Just Well Law firm to help her clients recover financially, so that they can rebuild their health and their lives. And I think one of the things that is so powerful about Kristina is she has been impacted herself, her and her family, so she truly understands this. We have other episodes with Kristina that we'll link to, of course, in the show notes. And then, for those of you who may not know, Michael Rubino, he is one of the co-founders of Change the Air Foundation. He's been on before, and is an indoor and mold remediation expert, and so they're here to kind of take us through what's going on in our military housing. So Kristina, I thought you could start us off. Can you kind of explain why the government and military shifted to privatize housing in the 1990s through the Military Housing Privatization Initiative, kind of like, talk to us about what were the goals, and like, why did the government essentially hand over day to day operations of these military houses to private companies?

KB

Kristina Baehr

04:13

Well, there was, at the time, a problem with military housing. So let's be really clear, it has been going on for decades, and the housing was in disrepair, and the government, at that time was going through a season of thinking that privatized contractors could solve all things. So if we just

send this to the market, it'll be great. They'll take care of it. So to be clear, these privatized housing companies were hired to clean up the housing and to make it better and safer for military families, and they've done exact opposite.

KS

Kendra Seymour

04:49

Yeah, so essentially, the government, is this fair to say, didn't want to be landlords anymore. They didn't want that, like day to day responsibility, essentially, right? And they needed someone else to come in and solve the problem, right?

KB

Kristina Baehr

05:02

They wanted somebody else to come in and solve the problem. This is happening all across our country, by the way. I mean, we we see these huge high rises being sold the next investment firm, this is private equity. This is the same general concept where, if we put it to the capitalistic markets, it's going to get better. If there's a belief that that's true. But the problem is, the bigger it is, the more profit involved, the more they're going to try to maximize that profit, and unfortunately, it's at the expense of military families, and ultimately, at the expense of national security.

KS

Kendra Seymour

05:47

Yeah, and we're going to get into that. So kind of paint and this, Kristina or Mike, either of you, and both of you may want to jump in, because I know you've been on base housing. You've toured these homes extensively. Kristina, you have a number of clients. Can you kind of paint a picture for those listening about what they're experiencing and what kind of complaints you're hearing most often.

KB

Kristina Baehr

06:08

Well, I get a lot of mold complaints, but it's so far beyond mold. It's asbestos, it's lead, it's contaminated water, it's contaminated soil, contaminated air. We have super fun sites to start with. So there's just intense contamination on every base, but the housing problems in particular that Michael and I have been looking at are their entire neighborhoods. And every neighborhood is different, has a different problem. Where there's structural problems with the housing. So, for example, in one neighborhood, they replaced all the roofs with metal roofs. They didn't add the appropriate ventilation. In that entire neighborhood ceilings have been falling in for a decade with asbestos, lead and mold, because the roof has become very hot. You add an HVAC and you get condensation in the ceiling. I'll let Michael get into the details, but basically, condensation on the ceiling, roofs fall down. Rather than address the problem. They come in and they just put band aids on it, or they blame the tenants, or they just move in the new family. So that's one

neighborhood. Another neighborhood has no vapor barrier, and so there's mold covering every single floor underneath the flooring. So you've got babies who are fine, and suddenly they're crawling on that floor, and they end up with severe neurological damage because they're so close to a bed of toxic mold. And it's, again, in that neighborhood, it's every single house has that same exact problem. These privatized housing companies know of the problems and just come in and put band aids on it, and then put the next family in, get people out, get people in, and they are turning a blind eye to the very real dangers that are affecting military families. And it's all about the incentives. Show me the incentives, and I'll show you the outcomes. And that's what you have here.

KS

Kendra Seymour

08:07

So it's almost like, and for those listening a lot of our military families, they don't stay in the same place for very long, maybe a couple of years. And so it's just, you know, put off dealing with it, cover it up, and then that tenant moves on, and somebody else moves in, and the whole process starts all over. Mike, now I know you have walked through some of these houses from your viewpoint and expertise, like, can you tell us some other things that you're seeing? I know Kristina highlighted a few.

MR

Michael Rubino

08:34

Oh, yeah. So let me ask you this, have you ever heard of the term put lipstick on a pig?

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Kendra Seymour

08:38

I have but why don't you unpack it? Because it's a great visual for us.

MR

Michael Rubino

08:42

Great idea. So this whole terminology, put lipstick on a pig. It really means you cover up by you cover up the pig, you make it look prettier. Here's the issue, right? When the military housing hired all these privatized companies, you know, 30, 40, years ago, whatever the timeframe is at this point, and sign these 50 year contracts, not a very intelligent idea, by the way. But moving on from that, what they actually did was they put lipstick on a pig, and they covered up all these different issues, but never actually solved the root cause of the issue, right? And it's actually pretty big terminology in like, the flipping community, if you ever watch these HGTV shows, right? Where they come in, they basically just like, build over all these different problems. It looks pretty

right, like, it looks like it's fixed, but all these fundamental issues are never addressed. And then what ends up happening is, a lot of people, they move into these flip homes, they start to get sick, right? So that's what I mean by this whole lipstick on a pig. And when I walk into these houses, that's exactly what I see. I see, you know, everything's freshly painted in the one property that Kristina was talking about, sorry, one community. There's a community of houses, not just one property. The ceilings were literally caving in, like literally falling down. Okay, that's how saturated they were. And you know what they did? Brilliant idea, ready. They take one by fours, so these are one inch by four inch pieces of wood, and they just start tacking that wood up to keep the ceilings from caving in. Now that was a strategy that they employed instead of actually addressing the root cause of the issue. Which the root cause of the issue in this particular case, is exactly what Kristina said. So the condensation was literally absorbing into the ceiling, hence it literally crumbling and collapsing. And again, they just tacked one by fours up and said, this will solve the problem. I want you to think about this for a second. Think about they go to the store, they buy all this material, okay? They pay all these people to go house by house, by house, by house, to put up these pieces of wood instead of addressing the problem. I mean, it's literally like going into your backyard and taking a pile of money and just lighting it on fire. That's what we're doing. And so this whole putting lipstick on a pig strategy, unfortunately, it doesn't actually work, and worse off, it makes people think that the problem's solved, when it's actually not. So all the while, these people are living in these homes, right? That they're telling them it's been appropriately resolved. And what we had found while we were there was extraordinary numbers of mold contamination inside the wall cavities, because this area was cascading down the walls, inside the ceiling cavities, inside the HVAC system and beyond, right? And so, as you can see, the proof is in the pudding that these strategies are not effective,

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Kendra Seymour

12:07

Yeah, and we have a new military liaison, just to add and more, even more context to this. And when she moved into military housing, I mean, they have like, visible mold on the vents, and the relative humidity inside was like 73% which is, can be conducive to certain kinds of mold growth. And so these are very systemic issues. And there's a great quote by someone named Dr Joseph Lstiburek, and he says, "This isn't rocket science, it's building science." So it's not that we don't have solutions, true solutions for these problems. It's that they're being ignored. So Kristina, I've heard you talk about some of the crazy excuses that military families have been given by management companies.

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Kristina Baehr

12:56

The excuses are just insane. One of my clients happens to be Italian, and so they and by the way, it's in the neighborhood where all the ceilings have been falling down for at least a decade. So

they've had a decade of ceilings falling down, including on a kid's bed, right, with lead, asbestos and mold. And so this solution that they've been doing is putting up the wood that Michael described, which, by the way, makes it look like shiplap. So people kind of like it. They're like, oh, it looks pretty, right? You're putting in place wet materials. You're holding in place the wet materials instead of removing them. So that's the context. And this guy walks in and says, you must be Italian. She's like, yeah. And he says, because you must be making lots of pasta up here the water, there's water condensation on your ceiling in the kitchen, and it must be from all the pasta you're making. Just unbelievable stuff. Or, you know, the problem is really that you have the air conditioning on, and you shouldn't have air conditioning on. Or you didn't have it on, right? And you shouldn't have had the air conditioning on. We've had situations where they've come in, they said, you know what, no problem, we will fix it. What you really need is a dehumidifier. And so we're going to come in, we're going to give you a dehumidifier. And so we come in and we look in the HVAC, and there is a beautiful, big, nice dehumidifier. Kendra, not plugged in. They didn't even plug it in. And that's not one time. And Michael, how many dehumidifiers have we see that have not been plugged in?

MR

Michael Rubino

14:42

None of them were plugged in.

KS

Kendra Seymour

14:44

Yeah

KB

Kristina Baehr

14:44

So, I mean, the best was, so I'm, we're with Michael, and can you tell them, Michael about the drip pans. So we walk into a house, and where did you go to look in this house?

MR

Michael Rubino

15:00

Yeah, so two things, one, the dehumidifiers were not plugged in, but even if they were plugged in, they weren't even set up properly. Like, we literally opened up the book for the dehumidifiers that were just sitting there, the installation guides. And we're looking because it, I was like, it doesn't look like it's set up properly for this specific climate. It was in Florida, and sure enough, it was not. The tube for the dehumidifier, like the actual tube that takes the exhaust in and then pushes it out, right so you get that loop of dehumidification. It wasn't looped properly, not for climate like Florida. So what was going to happen was, every time the HVAC shut off, the dehumidifier would shut off. Kind of pointless, don't you think, because you would want, in Florida, supplemental demidification. But that was just one aspect. Then we go inside these houses, all right, and they have this, like, return plenum, okay? And it's just like you typically would see a return plenum. You've got the grate, you take the grate off, you pull the filter away. And they, these guys, actually put the drip pan inside the return plenum. So for those that don't know what that means, that means that the HVAC is it condensates, it's going to drip, and those drips are going to go in this bucket. Well, lo and behold. I mean, when we were talking to these people, first off, how many times Kristina, were they saying that this thing flooded? And that's what they say for every single house.

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Kristina Baehr

16:24

Every single house has the drip pan overflowing.

MR

Michael Rubino

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And it just leaks into the house where they have to, like, pick up the carpet, pick up the padding, do this whole dry out thing. They don't remove any of the wet drywall, which is a whole nother problem. But either which way these things leak out into the to the open space, because they're, I mean, you just it's not set up properly. But even if it, even if that wasn't an issue, having a drip pan in your return plan is a terrible idea, because as it drips, you're gonna grow some mold, you're gonna grow some bacteria, right? And those are gonna literally just burp right back into the system, because it's constantly drawing air from that space and literally redistribute across the house. So it has to be the worst indoor air quality design I think I've ever seen.

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Kristina Baehr

17:10

It's like putting a swamp in your HVAC, right? Because you don't want standing water anywhere, but you certainly don't want standing water in the middle of your HVAC. It's overflowing in every house. So here's the thing, we go to every house and it's the same problem, and we say, well, what do they do when you call them? And they say, oh, they come and they drain the pan. So they know that this is a problem in every single house, and they just come in and they drain the pan. Now bear in mind that is the same neighborhood that has the floor of mold, so when it overflows, it's overflowing onto the floor that is already carpeted with mold. So you can imagine how dangerous this happens. This this gets over time, and Kendra, we have named that case, and we have named it for Cam and here's why, our sweet friend, baby Camden, had a brain bleed when he was born, but he was otherwise fine. Was meeting his, he was meeting his milestones, but then he started crawling on that floor, and he suffered a stroke and he's going to live with the consequences for the rest of his life, because nobody bothered to change that floor.

KS

Kendra Seymour

18:44

Yeah.

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Kristina Baehr

18:46

Yeah, okay, so when we went to that house, same neighborhood, different house, but same neighborhood just a few down, Michael saw the very same problems that had been there years before when Cam was crawling on that floor and in this house, the new family had also had to move because, again, a child was seriously injured. Guess what the name of that child was?

KS

Kendra Seymour

19:22

I don't know

KB

Kristina Baehr

19:23

Camden.

KS

Kendra Seymour

19:25

No.

KB

Kristina Baehr

19:26

So this is Camden's case. This is a case for all the Camdens and all the kids. And I have a particular place my in my heart, my team knows this for children. And if the case involves a kid, I almost always take it. No matter what the problems are with the case. But I mean, this is a case for the children, because it's entirely preventable. It's entirely predictable, and they don't seem to care about the Camdens of the world who will be seriously injured in these environments, in these very same houses, because you'd rather drain the drip pan than actually address the problem. And Michael, how much would it cost to fix the problem?

MR

Michael Rubino

20:23

Not very much. You know, we were literally they'd have to just raise the system, put the drip pan above where the actual plenum is, just like how it should be. It really wouldn't be that crazy to fix cost wise. You know, the other thing to consider Kristina too, is like, you know,

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Kristina Baehr

20:41

Is it like, \$10 is it a million dollars? Like, what?

MR

Michael Rubino

20:48

Oh, I mean, probably 1000 bucks. I mean, to do, they could have fixed it correctly in the first place, obviously.

KB

Kristina Baehr

20:55

So we're gonna let the Camdens of the world get sick. We're gonna send maintenance guys out to that that house, over and over and over again to fix the drain pan, because you weren't willing to spend \$1,000 to solve the problem. And by the way, I asked Michael. I said, Michael, when we're in

this house, would you like, would you like to see the attic? Because these houses had problems with the attic too. And what did you say.

MR

Michael Rubino

21:25

Of course.

KB

Kristina Baehr

21:27

So what happened when you went up to look at the attic?

MR

Michael Rubino

21:31

They have the attic sealed shut so that you cannot go up there.

KS

Kendra Seymour

21:38

I've heard similar cases too of you can't access the HVAC system that those are locked and and kept from the people living in the home. I'm really glad, Kristina, you made the pivot, because we were going to go there next. Like so far, we were kind of talking about the cosmetic issues and, oh, that's annoying. But really, at the end of the day, this is like a health crisis. These children are getting sick. Their families are getting sick. The service members living in them are getting sick. And it is a, it's a human issue if you think about it. We are making the people who are protecting us sick. It's a mission readiness issue. It's a waste of taxpayer dollars. There's so many strings you can pull here, and maybe we'll get into some of that. But I wonder, Kristina, if you can, if you're comfortable speaking to it, because we've spoken with military families a lot more recently, and there's allegations of like tampered work orders and pressure, you know, to close some of these maintenance requests quickly and more. So can you kind of walk us through what usually happens when these families you've been working with submit an order and say, Hey, I'm seeing mold on my vents, or there's bubbling in the ceiling. Like, can you speak to any of that?

KB

Kristina Baehr

22:53

Oh, there's so much fraud. Someone reports mold. First of all, they'll often take out the word mold from the complaint altogether. They won't address it. I had a client whose maintenance guy came in and said, is that a dog? Did you register that dog? We might have to do something about that.

Veiled threats. We're gonna take away your dog if you complain about this again. That's the implication. And so what you have is you have these, these work orders that are either ignored or delayed or they're closed out and then they reopened again. And it's fraud. They'll also come in and they'll say they fixed it, but they didn't. Or they'll say that they're going to remediate, but they don't. So some of it is fraud, some of it's just intentional neglect. And I say intentional, I really mean it. It's intentional. It's intentional to go in there and put slabs, shiplap, up when you know that wet materials cause water damage, and water damage causes mold, and mold causes physical and mental harm. That's poisoning. And my clients use the word. They are quite literally poisoned at home by these big institutions who could care less. And then the other fraud that happens is they have these code words within the system so they don't use the word mold, but even when there is growth reported or something like that, they won't put it in the maintenance history. So part of you know the congressional actions that happened, you know now, five or six years ago, they got a bill of rights, Tenants Bill of Rights. And so now you get a maintenance report when you come in and you get the seven year work order history. Well, when you get the work order history, it doesn't include mold, because they don't, if they don't use the word, then they don't get it. It doesn't even include all the water contamination events, because we've done FOIAs for the same properties and in the FOIAs, you see entries that don't exist on the seven year work order history that was given to the tenant. And by the way, when people say, I'd like my test results please, they say, you can go FOIA them. They refuse to give, so they don't want people to know what they've been exposed to. It's intentional, and it's incredibly dangerous.

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Kendra Seymour

25:46

So, I mean, that is just like, mind blowing, like they get, they can circumvent this by just not saying mold which and Mike, maybe you can speak to this gives them kind of, the like, how are you just able to say, I'm not going to remediate that? And like, look the other way. Why? How are they getting away with that?

MR

Michael Rubino

26:04

Well, it's exactly what they're doing, right? They're not following proper protocols or procedures. You know, they're trying to, you know, they're basically everything to them is like this general construction work order, right? So a lot of this stuff gets remediated without engineering controls, without proper containment. They're not doing, you know, following proper protocol procedure. They're not bringing in, you know, professional, licensed professionals like IEPs, for example, that are mold assessors in the state of Florida, because there's a state licensure program in Florida. They're just not following any sort of guidelines that they should be following to make sure they're doing a good job, right? So, how are they getting away with it. Well, if you don't say mold, right, then you don't follow the mold guidelines. And so it's clear to me that they're trying to

circumvent the entire thing by just flat out denying mold. I mean, I remember, you know, talking to some of these families, and they're like, yeah, I complained about mold and they came in and they're like, oh, that's just dust, that's not mold, right? And they literally just are gaslighting people, threatening them, you know, literally changing the work order history. I mean, it's crazy. You know, we thought we resolved this problem years ago when this all came up into Congress, and that's when they actually enacted this seven year work order history. But they're just manipulating it, right? They're just literally circumventing the whole thing. And so we're not in a better place. We're in the exact same place. And, you know, people are getting sick, right? It's just unacceptable behavior.

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Kristina Baehr

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What we now know, though, is that it causes neurological harm. And at a Navy town hall in Key West, they were giving out the NIH, two page document on the health effects of mold. That's extraordinary. That talks about cognitive harm. What are we, what kind of cognitive harm? Developmental delays, memory loss, processing speed, confusion. I don't like to use word brain fog, because brain fog sounds like nebulous. These are the things that that means, right? Do you want the guy with the button to the nuclear arsenal to have slow processing speed and short term memory loss. That is what is actually happening right now. These bases are incredibly strategic for our country, and we have men and women in uniform in those houses, and we are poisoning them and causing brain damage. That is not safe. That's not safe for all of us. You know, we, I can talk about the kids all day long, but we need to also talk about the men and women and our military leaders. We need them to be safe. We need their brains to work. We cannot be mission ready if their brains don't work.

KS

Kendra Seymour

29:02

Yeah, and I mean, if that isn't like a sobering thought, if the kids didn't get you, I sure hope hearing what Kristina just said just makes this abundantly clear about why this is such a widespread problem. And then to your point, like, what does this mean for the future of our military? Because so many, such a large percentage of our military is legacy. Meaning they have a parent, a grandparent, another relative in the military, and they themselves sign up to make this sacrifice and to serve our country. And if they're growing up in homes and they become medically ineligible because they were impacted, or they see this happen to their family. My goodness, like, what, who wants to sign up for that if this is how they're going to be treated. It's just it's mind blowing. Now, Kristina, you talked about something, and Mike, you brought it up too. So let's for those listening, you know, in I think it was 2018, right? This really has been in front of Congress. And they're like, alright, we see this as a problem. And you mentioned the Tenant Bill of Rights,

which was introduced to the National Defense Authorization Act. So you know, what was the intention behind it? And where is it falling short today? Because it's been, what, six years now.

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Kristina Baehr

30:16

I mean, where is it not falling short? I mean, it's been complete, I think completely ineffective. I think it's done. It's been completely counterproductive. Because it basically you're saying these tenants have rights. Well, the tenants already have rights, and you're saying that they have the right to know what has happened in these houses, and they should have a seven year history when you get there and they're given them as a matter of right? But if those seven year histories aren't accurate, then it's even worse. It's worse than not getting them at all, because you're you get it and you look okay, mold, asbestos, I don't see anything like that. I'm good. I am good. And then the other thing that they did as part of that same process is they provided oversight by the Army and the Navy and the military agencies. Well, now you've got the military arms distracted by the housing problems and what's their incentives? Show me the incentives, and I'll show you the outcomes. The Navy officers want to get on with their day. They don't want to be paying attention to Susie Q's housing problem. So Susie Q becomes dramatic. Oh, she's very, she's just dramatic. You know, I mean, these military moms, you know, they're a little bit dramatic. And so we now, we just label them as dramatic. So it had a completely counterproductive effect. I think having the federal agencies kind of in charge of monitoring somehow the housing has just absolutely made the whole system even worse, and it's made liability worse, because who's responsible, right? They say, well, the Navy's is looking at what we're doing. We're you know, we ran, obviously, the Navy knew that we were putting up these, this shiplap, right? It's like, incredibly, it's so dangerous, because where does the buck stop? And the whole point of having the privatized institutions was to allow the bucks to stop with a privatized entity, so that they could be responsible. Now we're blurring the responsibility even further. Which was already blurred, because who actually owns these houses? Many places, it's actually the military that owns the houses, which is why the privatized company doesn't have any true incentive, or they would say, even ability to come in and fix the actual problem.

KS

Kendra Seymour

32:46

Yeah

KB

Kristina Baehr

32:48

So you have this, these are the problems that we are seeing. So let me tell you a story. True story of my client. Mom is concerned about her house, and she keeps calling them to come and fix it,

and every time they come, she gets sicker and her family gets sicker, and she knows that the house is making her sick, and she's pointing out specific problems. There are these windows that are still leaking, there's this door that's leaking. There's a leak in the bathroom upstairs. She's very specific about the problems, and they keep coming over. They do. They come over, over and over and over again, and eventually they just say, she can't be pleased. So they finally offered to move her out, and she moves out, and she's still worried about this house, so she testifies before Congress. She goes to a town hall. She files a class action complaint where she's the lead plaintiff, and she says, Hello, look, this is not safe for any of our military families. We can't be living in this housing, hello, hello, hello. Then she removes herself from that complaint and files a separate personal injury claim, because she her kids are so very, very sick. Okay, when, when we actually figured out what was going on? It turns out that they just had labeled her high profile. She was a high profile tenant. So I have one of the leaders of this company at deposition, and I say, Sir, he was, he was the one responsible for this housing, okay, it came to your attention when she testified before Congress, right? Yes. At that point, did you send an inspector to that house to see if it was okay. No. Did you pull the maintenance history and take a look at it? No. Well, then you got the federal complaint right. Did you order an inspection at that time? No. She details all the problems in this complaint, with specific places in the house where it's leaking. Did you address that? No. Well, what about when she filed her federal complaint? Came to your desk again, right? Yes. Same house, right? Yes. Same complaints, right? Yes. At that point, did you call a maintenance guy and say, can you go and check out this house? Did you order an inspection? Did you review the maintenance history? No. I reviewed the maintenance history with him, and I said, would you ever live in this house? And he said, No. But he never looked at it before that deposition, because it was clear from the maintenance history that the problems had never been fixed, the same problems over and over and over again. She wasn't a Karen. She was right. And you know what I said, Sir, you didn't care about that, about the family that's currently living in that house? I said, you know who cared enough to order an inspection? Me, I am the first one to order an inspection of that house. At, my firm was brand new, by the way, at my own cost. I don't know if Michael charged me. Let's get back to Michael to tell what happened when you went to that house.

MR

Michael Rubino

36:35

It was atrocious. You know, I got goosebumps, literally listening to you revisit the story. I mean, it was literally insane, the amount of problems that this house had and the way in which they went about this entire process. Yeah, I don't remember how many pages my report was, but it was pretty extensive, and it was just violation after violation of just all these different industry standard of cares that they were supposed to provide that they just didn't. I think what really frustrates me about this entire thing is like, when I think about our military, like they're literally signing up and they're putting their lives on the line for us as Americans, literally fighting for our freedom, right? And we're not asking for them to live in the Taj Mahal. I mean, the these houses are just not good living conditions. And it's no secret that a lot of our young kids are now

medically ineligible to even join the military. And I can't help but wonder how much this plays a role into that,

KB

Kristina Baehr

37:39

And what they want to do is they want to bleed out like the companies like mine that are investigating, right? They know that if, they, I think that they were probably banking on me not inspecting that house because that family had moved out. But when Michael and Josh went there, there was mold growing on the new kid's bed.

KS

Kendra Seymour

38:01

It mean, it just sounds like this is like a classic case of like, we're gonna push it off for as long as possible. We're gonna deny. We're going to do as little as possible, because we can pass the puck on to someone else. And I think, you know, these companies probably see military families as a really bankable venture, because you have reliable source of tenants year after year. Some many people don't realize that the, their rent is automatically deducted from their paycheck. So it's not as simple as you know, I'll withhold rent. I'll follow through with you know my legal rights, because in many cases, that looks a little different. So maybe speak quickly, because someone listening might say, hey, well, why don't they just move out and live somewhere else? And someone not familiar with military and housing stipends, can you just quickly talk to why it's not as simple as, we'll just move to a different house

KB

Kristina Baehr

39:03

Because you're using your BAH, which is your housing allowance, and your housing allowance is going directly to this privatized housing company, and they don't want to let you out of your lease until your lease is over. So it's the same reason that people have a hard time moving out of any big building, right? Because they're threatened with this going to affect your credit, and we're going to send it to creditors, and, by the way, we're going to get your command involved, which, again, is this terrible system where you have both involved in this, I think, in a way that pushes down the tenant instead of lifting the tenant up. And so, you know, people don't aren't able to leave for that reason. But I will say this, I have had clients sleep in a tent on their own property in military housing, and they felt better, and so they spent months sleeping in a tent. So I think some people say they can't afford to leave, and I understand that, and that's especially true with military housing. Other clients have come to the conclusion that they can't afford to stay because the impact on their health will be with them forever, and the cost of that is tremendous, and that's why this is so critical for us all to pay attention to, because what is happening to these military

families is not fair, and it's not it shouldn't be their job to try to figure out how to get their family to safety when they're also trying to deploy and represent our country overseas. You can't have somebody overseas focused on national or international crises of our day and worried about whether the leasing office is going to allow their family to move to a safer location. And then the other thing that happens, I should add, is that they try to move them. That's okay, you don't need to stay in this house, you can have this other house down the street.

KS

Kendra Seymour

41:20

With the same problems as you just left.

KB

Kristina Baehr

41:22

That house has the exact same problem. And don't worry, we'll put you in Patriot housing in the interim. Well, people go into Patriot housing and it's worse than the place that they've just come to, because at least the place they've come to, they've been replacing the filters they they've made it safe for themselves, as safe as they could make it. And then they get to the Patriot house and they find that the filter is completely black because the agency never took responsibility to even change it, and there hasn't been any air purification in there, and there hasn't been any air scrubbing. So it's a work. It's you're always trying to figure out how to get your family to a safer place. So I know Kendra, you work with people a lot and help them think through these things. But I always say, try to say to my clients, it doesn't have to be decided today. You're going to, it's like, it's like, helping someone get out of an abusive relationship. It doesn't have to be today. You can make a safety plan. Move every day, do something for your own healing, so that you can move towards safety. And some people, it'll take months to get out. And there are only two military housing. There are only two military families that I really, Michael and Josh and I had to give the specific instructions to get out. One was, there was water coming out of their sockets. You know, that's a that's a higher hazard as well. Like you can't have a toddler in that building. You got to get out. So there are a few where, truly emergency, get out right now. But for the most part, make a plan. Move towards safety. You're going to take it one day at a time for your family.

KS

Kendra Seymour

43:06

Yeah, and I think there's power in those small steps can add up to big changes. And at Change the Air Foundation, we are going to have some more resources specifically targeted towards military families and how to navigate that chain of command. What your options are those are going to be coming, we have our Start Here section, which takes you through what a good inspection should look like and what safe and effective remediation should look like. Because, again, it's not that as

a society, we don't know what these things should look like and how they should be handled. We do. It's just they're not being followed and, in many cases, being outright ignored. As we kind of wrap up, and I'll ask each of you a final question, but we'll start with you, Mike. If a military family, they suspect mold and water damage or things like that, what is something, like what would their first step be, in your opinion, as a mold remediation expert, things that they can do or maybe shouldn't do like today, if they think, Oh, my God, that's me.

MR

Michael Rubino

44:04

Yeah, first off, I think they should hire and seek out their own expert to really survey the property and give them real, actionable data. Because I think if they rely on the military's handyman service that really isn't trained in mold assessments and mold remediation, I think they're going to spin in circles like we've seen so many different times. And so I think it's really important that, you know, and I this the same advice for anybody in America living in a house, that they really should have their own experts come in and investigate for them. And, you know, it's not uncommon to obtain second opinions, right? And so I think it's really important to do your due diligence, do your homework, and look, I just want to say, look, if you love America and you love our military, you need to be sharing this episode. You know, it's, this is so important. This is, it is a national security issue. This is a really big problem. You know, housing in general is. A big problem. We know that, you know, around 50% of homes have a history of water damage, but you know, this is our safety as a civilization, and we really need to get around this key core issue so that Congress can do something about this, because it's a big problem.

KS

Kendra Seymour

45:15

Yeah, absolutely. And like I said, information can be found on our website about what that first step might be to find a true expert who really understands the health consequences. Kristina, why don't you wrap it up? If there are military families listening and they want to know what their rights are, or maybe consider legal steps like, what would some first steps look like for them?

KB

Kristina Baehr

45:37

Well, call our office, because we take every call, and we'll do a resource call with you. We'll send you the resources. Y'all are on on our resource list. We want people to have the information that I wish I had had when I was in your shoes, because I didn't know about any of this stuff. And I just want people to know, and I want people to have the information. And so we share information with every single person who calls. That doesn't mean that every case is viable, but we want to help you make it viable if you if we can and we can share resources with you.

KS

Kendra Seymour

46:11

Yeah.

KB

Kristina Baehr

46:12

Do not rely on the military or the privatized housing company to do any testing. They will not test. So your first step is to get your own independent assessment. You can pull resources to do that, and again, reach out to our office, and we'll share our resources about how to find a good inspector. But that's where it starts, figure out exactly what you're being exposed to, and then, more than anything, make a safety plan, because whether you have a case or not, don't let your house poison you. It's not worth it. Do whatever you can to reduce the exposure for your family. Whether that's making the house as safe as you can, or moving towards getting to a safer place and getting out, because do the privatized housing company, I've never seen them remediate anything properly. Mike and I will tell you, every house that we've gone into that's been remediated is worse. They only make it worse. So don't trust them when they come in, they're like, Oh, we're going to make it better for you. They're not. It's not going to be any safer.

KS

Kendra Seymour

47:21

Yeah, no, and we're going to link to your website to make it easy for people to find you. I appreciate both of you being here. Thank you so so much. So for everyone else listening, do me a favor, if this is a story that resonated with you, share it. If you are a military family and you're looking for next steps, head on over to [ChangeTheAirFoundation.org](https://www.ChangeTheAirFoundation.org). Or if you're any family, and you're wondering, oh, my goodness, maybe I'm in a rental. Maybe I'm in my home, and I don't know where to start. We have resources to take you through this process, and you're going to see going forward, that we are going to be shining a light on mold and water damage and the conditions of our military housing. We're doing a lot of policy work alongside some amazing organizations and volunteers to support our military families as well as residential properties, and we're really here to change the way that we are approaching mold and water damage in this country, because your health matters. So as I always say, no one's going to care about your health or your home as much as you, and that first step starts with knowledge, and we're here to support you. So head on over to [ChangeTheAirFoundation.org](https://www.ChangeTheAirFoundation.org), sign up for our newsletter, because we're going to send you weekly tips and information to help get you started. Thank you, everyone. So much for listening. We'll see you next time.