



Fact Sheet: How Housing Conditions are Failing Military Families

The Problem

Private companies have expanded to control 99% of military family housing in the U.S. under lucrative long-term contracts. In recent years, they have become mired in a crisis of their own making: mismanagement and safety negligence that risk compromising the well-being of service members and the readiness of the Department of Defense (DOD) itself.¹

The absence of federal mold standards and weak legal requirements have allowed privatized military housing companies to take a lax, inconsistent approach to addressing systemic problems that affect many military families. This pattern of mismanagement has harmed service members and prompted lawsuits alleging negligence against privatized military housing providers.²

In 2024, the DOD revealed that there had been at least 4,588 reports of mold found in Air and Space Forces privatized housing.³ Among service members and their families in both the Navy and Marine Corps, mold was identified as the most commonly cited issue in tenant complaints.⁴ Certain molds produce mycotoxins that can be very harmful to the immune system.⁵ This makes proper mold testing essential to the well-being of service members and their families. However, private housing companies have skirted proper mold testing and remediation amid an absence of federal mold standards.⁶

This revelation followed a congressional inquiry citing a POGO investigation, which exposed poor living standards, weak tenant protections, and legal loopholes that housing companies exploited to commit widespread fraud and abuse, potentially subjecting the roughly 700,000 service members and their families living in privatized military housing to unsafe conditions.⁷

¹ Steve Osunsami, Hannah Prince, and Janice McDonald, “Some Military Families Say They Face Unsafe Conditions in Privatized Housing,” *ABC News*, June 18, 2025, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/military-families-face-unsafe-conditions-privatized-housing/story?id=122783661>; Government Accountability Office, *Privatized Military Housing: Update on DOD’s Efforts to Address Oversight Challenges*, GAO-22-105866, (2022), 1, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-105866.pdf>.

² René Kladzyk, “From Toxic Mold to Fraud: How Privatizing Military Housing Became a Nightmare for Service Members,” *Mother Jones*, May 7, 2024, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2024/05/privatized-military-housing/>.

³ René Kladzyk, “‘Operation Counter-Mold’: The Hidden Battle in Military Homes,” Project On Government Oversight, October 24, 2024, <https://www.pogo.org/investigations/operation-counter-mold-the-hidden-battle-in-military-homes>.

⁴ Kladzyk, “Operation Counter-Mold” [see note 3].

⁵ Stephanie Kraft, Lisa Buchenauer, and Tobias Polte, “Mold, Mycotoxins and a Dysregulated Immune System: A Combination of Concern?,” *International Journal of Molecular Sciences* 12, no. 22 (2022), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8619365/>.

⁶ M.B. Pell, “U.S. Senators Call for Banning, Prosecuting ‘Slumlords’ of Military Housing,” *Reuters*, December 3, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/us/us-senators-call-for-banning-prosecuting-slumlords-of-military-housing-idUSKBN1Y72HO/>; Kladzyk, “Operation Counter-Mold” [see note 3].

⁷ Letter from Elizabeth Warren and Tim Kaine, United States Senators, et al., to Lloyd J. Austin III, Secretary of Defense, about “Military Housing and the Federal Enclave Doctrine,” July 9, 2024,

Another challenge facing military families is an obscure legal loophole that shields private housing providers: the federal enclave doctrine, which limits families' ability to seek recourse. This doctrine designates military installations as federal jurisdictions rather than state ones, meaning that present-day environmental, housing, and consumer protection laws have limited application on military bases.⁸

To make matters worse, private housing providers subject tenants to non-disclosure agreements, effectively preventing them from speaking out against negligent landlords or sharing their experiences with unsafe housing conditions.⁹ The practice has been so coercive in nature that it prompted senators to send a letter to then-Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, urging the DOD to end it.¹⁰

The Solution

As more service members and their families step forward to share their stories of dire conditions in military housing, Congress must waste no time in addressing these grievances and enacting reforms to establish a federal mold standard, limit the application of the federal enclave doctrine, and prohibit the issuance of non-disclosure agreements to tenants. The DOD needs your help, and so do service members. There are sections in this year's proposed National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) which POGO recommends that do exactly that and must be supported in conference:¹¹

- Sen. Sec. 2824. Directs the Secretary of Defense to implement mold mitigation measures at affected installations, develop mold-resistant construction standards for new housing on military installations, and incorporate mold-related illness training for military health professionals.¹²
- Sen. Amdt. 3544. Limits the application of the "federal enclave doctrine," a legal defense used to strip military families of rights afforded to their off-post neighbors.¹³
- Sen. Sec. 2826. Prohibits landlords from requesting non-disclosure agreements from tenants of privatized military housing.¹⁴

Moreover, there are bills worth supporting in both chambers that aim to reform military housing. Senate bill S. 2047, introduced by Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), would establish a DOD council to oversee

https://www.kaine.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/letter_to_dod_re_military_housing_and_enclave_doctrine.pdf;
Government Accountability Office, *Military Housing: DOD Needs to Strengthen Oversight and Clarify Its Role in the Management of Privatized Housing*, GAO-20-281, (2020), 1, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-281.pdf>.

⁸ Kladzyk, "From Toxic Mold to Fraud" [see note 2].

⁹ Patricia Kime, "98 Military Families Silenced by Nondisclosure Agreements with Private Base Housing Companies," *Military.com*, March 30, 2023, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2023/03/30/98-military-families-silenced-nondisclosure-agreements-private-base-housing-companies.html>.

¹⁰ Office of Mazie K. Hirono, "Hirono, Colleagues Urge DOD to Protect Military Families' Rights and End Use of Nefarious Non-Disclosure Agreements by Private Military Housing Contractors," Press Release, June 22, 2023, <https://www.hirono.senate.gov/news/press-releases/06/22/2023/hirono-colleagues-urge-dod-to-protect-military-families-rights-and-end-use-of-nefarious-non-disclosure-agreements-by-private-military-housing-contractors>.

¹¹ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026, S. 2296, 119th Cong., (2025), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/2296/text>.

¹² National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026, S. 2296, 119th Cong., § 2824 (2025), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/2296/text>.

¹³ Amendment No. 3544 to S. 2296, 119th Cong. (2025), <https://www.congress.gov/amendment/119th-congress/senate-amendment/3544/text>.

¹⁴ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026, S. 2296, 119th Cong., § 2826 (2025), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/2296/text>.

and improve privatized military housing through review, recommendations, compliance monitoring, and coordination. A bipartisan House bill, H.R. 10342, led by Representatives Sara Jacobs (D-CA), James Moylan (R-GU), and Marilyn Strickland (D-WA) seeks comprehensive reforms in response to reports of unsafe and unsanitary military housing conditions.¹⁵

Contact

Omar Tabuni, Government Affairs Manager, Project On Government Oversight, omar.tabuni@pogo.org

¹⁵ Office of Sara Jacobs, “Rep. Sara Jacobs, Sen. Elizabeth Warren Introduce Bipartisan, Bicameral Bill to Improve Privatized Military Housing,” Press Release, June 13, 2024, <https://sarajacobs.house.gov/news/press-releases/rep-sara-jacobs-sen-elizabeth-warren-introduce-bipartisan-bicameral-bill-to-improve-privatized-military-housing>; Military Housing Oversight and Service Member Protection Act, H.R. 10342, 118th Cong., (2024), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/10342/text>; Military Housing Readiness Council Act, S. 2047, 118th Cong., (2023), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/2047/all-info>.