

Boston City Councillor Maura Hennigan
Comments made to staff of Senator Edward Kennedy's Health Committee on
Health Effects of Mold Exposure
September 28, 2005

First I want to thank Senator Kennedy for his commitment to addressing the considerable dilemma of health problems associated with poor indoor air quality, particularly exposure to indoor mold. I am especially grateful to Sharon Kramer who has taken the bull by the horns with her personal commitment to continue to bring this health issue to the forefront. I must voice my outrage at the personal legal attacks Sharon is suffering by exposing the relationship between big business funneling money to influence medical papers that harm the health of our fellow Americans: medical papers that are relied upon by less knowledgeable physicians who are attempting to treat our citizens who have been harmed by mold exposure. The Boston Globe did a piece recently on the unreliability of some peer reviewed medical papers, so it should be no shock that Sharon is facing this battle.

Our country is facing an enormous challenge dealing with the recent horrific flooding and loss of life and property in the Gulf region because of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. At this point in our understanding of mold growth and its devastating effects on the health of our people, I am alarmed about the mixed messages being sent about how dangerous mold exposure is to those who return to their homes, schools and other buildings in the south. If no one comes to the plate on this, we are relegating untold numbers of our southern citizens to a lifetime of health problems on top of everything else they have suffered.

Someone needs to do something about this now, and I am grateful to Senator Kennedy for his continued support and leadership with this issue. I know that last September, during Mold Awareness Week in Washington, Senator Kennedy arranged for meetings with doctors from both his HELP (Health Education Labor and Pension) and Health Committees to sit down with national advocates to bring his office up to speed on that mold exposure is doing to harm the health of so many in this country and I am grateful that this meeting was arranged today. Someone needs to do something now to help people who are suffering from a myriad of health problems due to mold exposure. So many people are sick and are receiving no treatment. I am encouraged by the University of Connecticut's "Guidance for Clinicians on the Recognition and Management of Health Effects Related to Mold Exposure and Moisture Indoors" released September 30th of last year. It is a tremendous start and I urge Senator Kennedy to do everything in his power to make our doctors aware of this important step forward in helping people who are ill due to mold exposure. I also urge him to look at some of the medical issues reported by countless people across this country referred to in this document that need further research and attention. Medical research needs to catch up with illnesses reported by our citizens.

The City of Boston is personally faced with the challenges of lack of meaningful approach to poor indoor air quality in our schools and other public buildings. I

authored the Indoor Air Quality Ordinance of 1996, which offered a rational approach to inspecting our schools and other buildings to flag properties that needed repair. Unfortunately, the required testing of our schools did not take place as the law dictated until recently. I am neither a doctor nor a scientist, but I am gravely alarmed by the results of the testing done in our schools and the possible correlation between the recently released Pediatric Asthma in Massachusetts conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Health and the Boston Globe's reporting today of some of our Boston schools on a federal watch list due to failure to reach goals. There may in fact be many reasons for that, but exposing our children to poor indoor air quality in schools should not be a possible contributing factor.

I know that some of our children are being exposed to poor indoor air quality in some of our Boston Housing Authority properties. In addition, it recently came to my attention that an employee at the BHA's offices on Chauncy Street in Boston is suffering from hypersensitivity pneumonitis, alleged to be caused from exposure to poor indoor air quality in the building and an investigation is currently being conducted.

Massachusetts has seen its share of poor indoor air quality in its public buildings as well. Courthouses, police stations, schools, hospitals, libraries, nursing homes, municipal and state buildings, including our own Boston City Hall, have been the subject of environmental problems. Homes have been gutted and leveled because of indoor mold proliferation. People are crying out for help and they are met with deaf ears because of a lack of focus on credible research already done on the health risks, proper diagnosis and treatment, and in some cases, the interference of progress by big business afraid to face their culpability.

This problem is bigger than any city or town in this country can handle, and indeed, it is a problem. Last December, I co-chaired a Boston City Council hearing, lasting over five hours, where people testified from across the country on how exposure to mold destroyed their health. The stories were heart wrenching and just about all who testified voiced their sense of frustration and helplessness in dealing with the problem. They desperately need help from their elected officials.

I urge Senator Kennedy to continue his work on this very serious health issue, especially in light of the problems we will face as a nation in the Gulf. Mold exposure harms our health and we need to work together to put a stop to it.