

Council Resolution 31-2016

Alicia B [foxfieldfarm@msn.com]

Sent: Monday, March 21, 2016 5:57 PM

To: CouncilMail

Attachments: Testimony to County Council.docx (15 KB)

Please see the attached letter to the County Council.

Thank you,

Alicia Buxton

Dear Members of the County Council,

My name is Alicia Buxton and I live at 2728 Jennings Chapel Rd, Woodbine, MD 21797. I have been a resident of Howard County for the last 16 years. I am here to support Council Resolution 31-2016.

My son is a freshman at Glenelg High School and he previously attended Lisbon Elementary and Glenwood Middle School. I have always been a dedicated volunteer in my son's schools and I have also served on the GT Advisory Committee and the Community Advisory Council. I have always felt blessed that my child was able to attend Howard County Public Schools and it is one of the reasons we looked for a farm in Howard County. But, something has changed in the last few years and I don't believe it is still the same great school system it once was.

Throughout 2013 to 2015 I served on the PTSA board at Glenwood Middle School as their PTACHC Delegate. In June of 2015 a staff member came to me and told me about a serious mold problem in the school. I was told that many staff members were ill because of the mold and two workers compensation lawsuits had been filed. The staff member stated that they had notified central office administrators several times asking them to notify parents, but nothing had been done. I immediately emailed the principal and asked him if what I was told was true. I had a very good relationship with the principal and when he failed to respond to my email I knew we had a problem. We have since proven through MPIO requests that within 5 minutes of receiving my email Principal Brown contacted Frank Eastham, the HCPSS Executive Director for School Improvement and Administration. According to the email, Mr. Eastham had directed Principal Brown in the fall to pass any questions about mold directly through Mr. Eastham. Mr. Brown stated that he was afraid that the mold problem in the school was going to become public knowledge.

A few days later I met with several staff members after school because I wanted to see evidence of the mold problem myself. They took me to a room where every single day the school custodians had to clean up mold on the bulletin boards, the books on the bookcases, and on the desks. Near the end of June I had a phone conversation with Mr. Frank Eastham. He was responding to a letter I had written to Dr Foose and the BOE telling them about what I knew. He told me the problem was that Principal Brown was the one doing the notifying. Although, we learned later that was not the case and Mr. Eastham was the one in charge of the notifying. I told him about the room I saw that had to have mold cleaned from it daily by the custodians and I asked him if the custodial staff had been trained to clean up the mold. Mr. Eastham stated they had been trained by the company HCPSS had hired. Unfortunately, the custodial staff report that they were never given any type of training or protective gear.

In September, several parents and I met with Deputy Superintendent Linda Wise, Frank Eastham, and several BOE members after a PTACHC meeting to discuss the mold problem at Glenwood Middle School. I sat across from Mr. Eastham and asked him if it was true that he was in a meeting with at least 50 GMS staff members and they told him they wanted parents notified, but he did nothing. His response was simply, "Yes." I told Ms. Wise that we simply wanted to know what happened, why HCPSS didn't do anything about it, and for HCPSS to acknowledge what they had done wrong in order for everyone to move forward. Ms. Wise stated, "You will never hear what you want to hear." We asked her for an independent survey of the building and I suggested using the industrial hygienist that the court had assigned to the two workers compensation cases. The court believed this person was unbiased and we thought he would be a good choice. At the time Ms. Wise said she would consider it, but several weeks later she stated an independent review would not be allowed. Later, we learned that the staff members won their workman's compensation cases.

At the October PTACHC meeting, Ed Light, the contractor HCPSS hired to remediate the mold and analyze the air quality addressed the delegates and stated that everything looked good at Glenwood. I told him I was surprised he would tell the group that everything was okay when the week before there were two leaks in different hallways at GMS, one so bad a bucket had to be placed under it. Mr. Light was unaware of the leaks.

I believe it should be unacceptable for our students to go to school and staff to work in Howard County School buildings where mold has to be cleaned from them daily. I also believe it should be unacceptable for senior level administrators to not report the facts to parents accurately without any repercussions.

This legislation will direct our Environmental Sustainability Board to review the various reports commissioned by HCPSS pertaining to mold. It will provide a report to the County Council and County Executive which makes recommendations that will address environmental concerns in our schools. I am still concerned about mold and the air quality in our schools and at this point there is no trust for me to believe what HCPSS tells us. I believe there needs to be an investigation of how HCPSS handled the mold problem and the removal of the mold. In addition, there should be an investigation of why HCPSS failed to notify parents about the mold problem even after staff members repeatedly asked upper level administrators to notify parents and two workers compensation cases were filed. This legislation is extremely important because a review by the consultant hired by HCPSS provides no objectivity and the HCPSS budget does not include funding for an additional consultant to provide a review.

It is important to me as a parent, a taxpayer, and a voter, for the Howard County Council to join together and give bipartisan support of Council Resolution 31-2016.

Thank you.