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## Military Families Say Mold In Homes Caused Health Issues

By **Adam Lidgett**

Law360 (December 3, 2019, 4:03 PM EST) -- Five military families are slamming a set of private companies that own and manage their housing at Florida's MacDill Air Force Base with a proposed class action blaming the businesses for mold in their homes and resultant health problems.

Three Air Force families and a duo of Army families filed a complaint in Florida federal court on Monday accusing the companies of not adequately building or managing their homes, which led to mold problems. The exposure to mold, the families claimed, has led to a variety of health issues, including respiratory problems, enlarged lymph nodes and headaches, among other problems.

"The severe toll on United States service members from living in substandard, mold-infested housing, cannot be overstated," the complaint said. "These men and women who serve our country and keep us safe, and their children, deserve to live in safe, clean and uncontaminated housing."

Among the companies named in the suit are the Michaels Organization and two of its units, Michaels Management Services Inc. and Interstate Realty Management Co. Also named as defendants are Clark Realty Capital LLC and AMC East Communities LLC, which the complaint said Clark operates.

The businesses operate or own privatized housing for families stationed at the base through a contract under the Military Housing Privatization Initiative, according to the complaint.

But military personnel and their families often have nowhere to turn if they aren't happy with the performance of their property owners, the suit said.

The families said in the complaint that they informed the property managers of the mold problems. However, the military families went on to say, the companies denied there were even mold problems at the base, and then the companies didn't adequately respond to the problem.

"In at least one instance, moldy conditions went untreated by defendants for so long that mushrooms grew out of the floor and carpet in one class member's home at MacDill AFB," the suit said.

The plaintiffs are seeking to represent a proposed class of any military member, or their family member, who lives or has lived in housing run by the defendants at the base, noting that there were 572 houses on the base that the defendants owned or managed.

"We brought this action on behalf of many military families that have been suffering from unsafe housing conditions and poor maintenance that caused many families including our members of the military's health to be compromised and unfortunately hospitalized too," Natalie Khawam, an attorney for the plaintiffs, said in a statement to Law360.

"Our military and their families deserve to live in safe homes. Their cries for help fell on deaf ears. They needed a voice and asked me to represent them in their litigation. We are seeking justice for these good patriotic families that honorably served our country," Khawam added.

A representative for the Michaels Organization declined to comment to Law360 on Tuesday.

Clark Realty could not immediately be reached for comment Tuesday.

The families are represented by Natalie Khawam of the Whistleblower Law Firm PA and Shanon J. Carson, E. Michelle Drake, Glen L. Abramson and Lane L. Vines of Berger Montague.

Counsel information for the businesses was not immediately available on Tuesday.

The case is Lenz et al. v. The Michaels Organization et al., case number 8:19-cv-02950, in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida.

--Editing by Daniel King.

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