

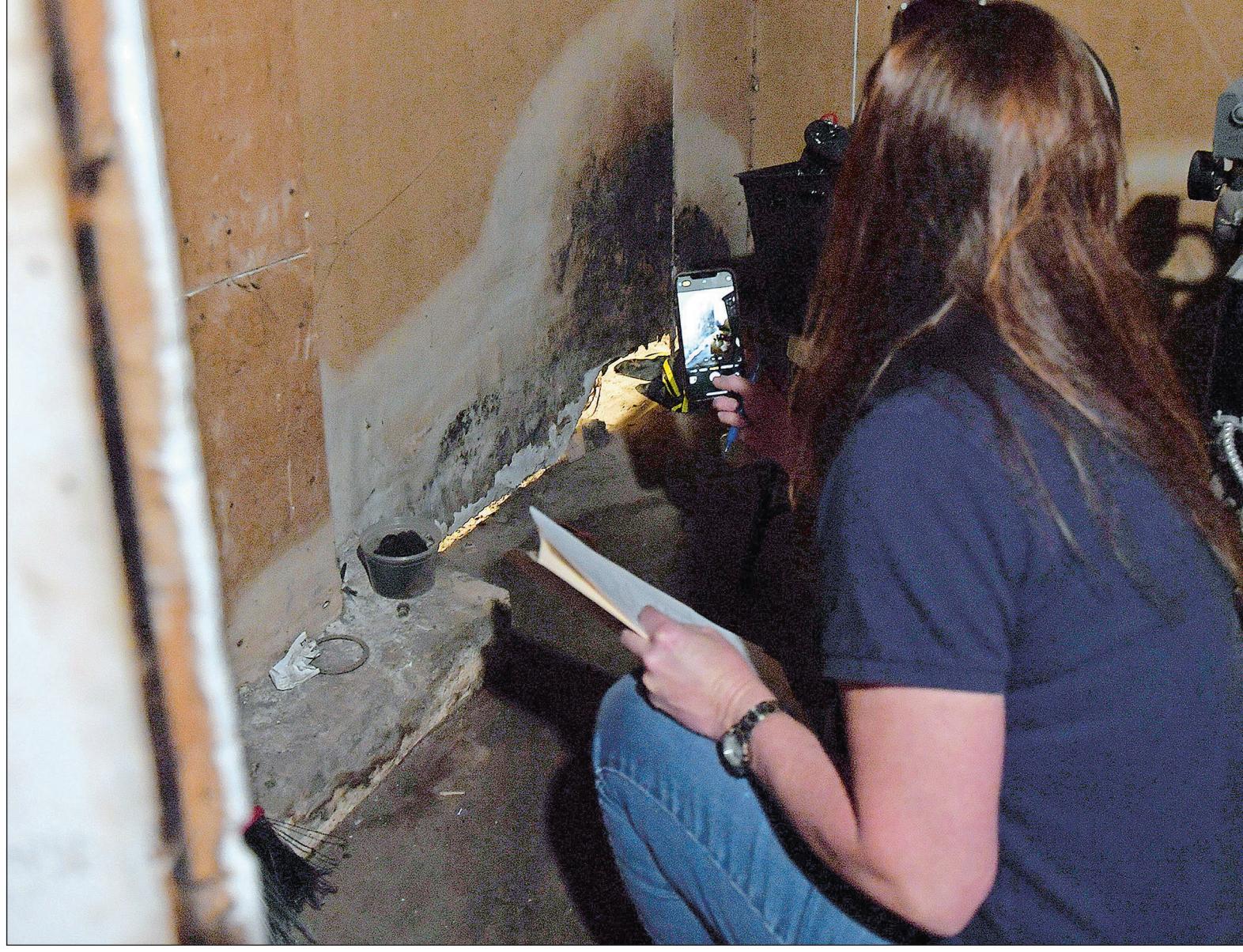
Sports: Patriots fall to the Ravens, 37-26 **Page B1**

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2022

VOL. 141, NO. 87

NEW LONDON www.theday.com \$1.50

HOUSING  
SOLUTIONS LAB



Exposure is making people sick, but it can be hard to escape

# It's raining mold

Story by **JULIA WALKER**  
Photographs by **SARAH GORDON**  
The Day



Cheryl Haase, top, an environmental technician with the Ledge Light Health District, conducts a mold inspection at a home in New London. Malkhi Sabb, 14, above, checks his phone at the Hampton Inn in Groton. Christina Tejeda and her three sons stayed at the hotel while their apartment in Branford Manor was being cleaned of mold.

127 Hempstead St. in New London. It is owned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and operated by the New London Housing Authority. Residents pay 30% of their monthly income in rent.

"I believe the housing is safe," said Matthew Anderson of the Imagineers property management company, who is director of rental management at Williams Park Apartments. "I also believe there needs to be significant

investment (at the federal level) and redevelopment since it is an old building."

For Hayden and others living in affordable housing, the issue is larger than being sick from mold. The issue is feeling as though they have no control over their health because of the housing situations they are in.

Mold is present in every property, said Ledge Light Health District Environmental Technician Cheryl Haase.

"Mold is everywhere," she said. "If you were to test the bottom of my shoe for mold, you would find it."

Since 2017, Ledge Light Health District has received 377 mold housing complaints from New London County, including both renters and homeowners.

Since there are no federal or state laws regulating mold, many renters in affordable housing cannot repair situations where they are sick from mold, and management is not always required by law to fix environments that are unhealthy due to mold.

#### Branford Manor's mold problem

Christina Tejeda, who lives in Branford Manor Apartments in Groton, is frustrated she cannot protect her children from being sick from

**SEE RENTERS PAGE A3**

# Russian call-up prompts backlash

Mobilization effort proceeds as protests erupt in several cities

The Washington Post

Russia launched new attacks on Ukraine on Sunday, using missiles and Iranian-made drones to strike Odesa and the Zaporizhzhia region, as protesters in several Russian cities demonstrated against the war effort and a new mass conscription.

Russia's drive to mobilize 300,000 new fighters and to stage illegal "referendums" in four occupied regions of Ukraine mark a sharp escalation by President Vladimir Putin, as he tries to hold the line despite multiple failures in his ongoing invasion, including a major retreat in the Kharkiv region earlier this month.

The efforts, amid warnings from Russian officials that Moscow could use nuclear weapons to defend illegally annexed regions, appear designed to shake Ukraine's resolve and to undermine Western military support for Kyiv. But Ukraine and its allies insist the moves are evidence that Russia is panicking — and that it can be beaten on the battlefield.

"He knows that he's losing the war," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said of Putin during an interview with CBS's "Face the Nation" on Sunday. "They admitted that their

**SEE RUSSIAN PAGE A5**

# Sailor joins community, assumes tough job at the sub base

By **ERICA MOSER**  
Day Staff Writer

**Groton** — Since reporting to the Naval Submarine Base in Groton a year ago, Fire Control Technician 1st Class Jessica Staley has become quartermaster at a local VFW post, joined the Ledyard Cemetery Commission, become involved with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Groton, and worked on her master of business administration degree.

That's in addition to her main job: teaching sailors at the Naval Submarine School how to track enemy targets and about the weapons they could be using, before they go to sea.

But over the summer, she started a collateral duty — a role on the side to help out the command — and was almost immediately thrown into a difficult situation, one that pulled her from the class she was in the middle of teaching.

**SEE STALEY PAGE A5**

MARK HAYDEN COLLECTS clumps of mold the size of ping pong balls and said he lines them along the rim of his bathroom sink. He keeps them as "evidence of abuse" by the management of Williams Park Apartments in New London.

#### HOUSING LAB

##### *The Crisis*

Hayden, who is 52 and disabled, said he first noticed clumps of mold in 2010 while cleaning his shower with a handheld shower head. When he sprayed the water at the vent on his bathroom ceiling, mold bounced down to the floor and the water came down completely black.

"It rained mold," he said.

Hayden has asthma, but said he only started using an inhaler after moving into Williams Park Apartments. He said he is "losing hope" that management will help him improve his quality of life in the apartment building, since they haven't fixed the mold issue after his 12 years of living there.

The 72 units at Williams Park Apartments are federally subsidized housing for disabled and elderly adults. The building is located at

#### HERE'S WHY THEY GIVE NAMES TO TROPICAL STORMS

With Fiona, Gaston, Hermine and Ian all swirling simultaneously on Saturday, the Atlantic Basin might have been mistaken for a bowl of alphabet soup.

The unusual outbreak of tropical cyclones — all the more jarring given the relative quiet of the 2022 Atlantic hurricane season — spoke to why those things have names.

As the National Hurricane Center and the World Meteorological Organization explain, affixing names makes things simpler for keeping track, beating the hay out of using something clunkier, such as, say, longitude-latitude coordinates.

Names are especially valuable when multiple storms are churning — like now, for instance — in the basin, which includes the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea.

Related stories, **A2**.

#### POLL: MOST DEMOCRATS WANT TO DITCH BIDEN IN 2024

A majority of U.S. Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents want the party to replace President Joe Biden as its nominee in the 2024 presidential election, according to a Washington Post-ABC poll reported on Sunday.

Just 35% of this group prefer Biden for the nomination, while 56% say the Democratic Party should pick someone else, according to the poll. Among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, 47% back former President Donald Trump for the 2024 nomination and 46% prefer that it be someone else.

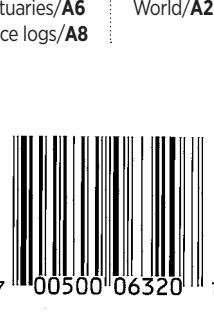
In a head-to-head matchup, the survey found Biden and Trump essentially tied: Biden edged Trump by 2 percentage points, 48%-46%. Among registered voters, the numbers reversed to give Trump a 2-point advantage.

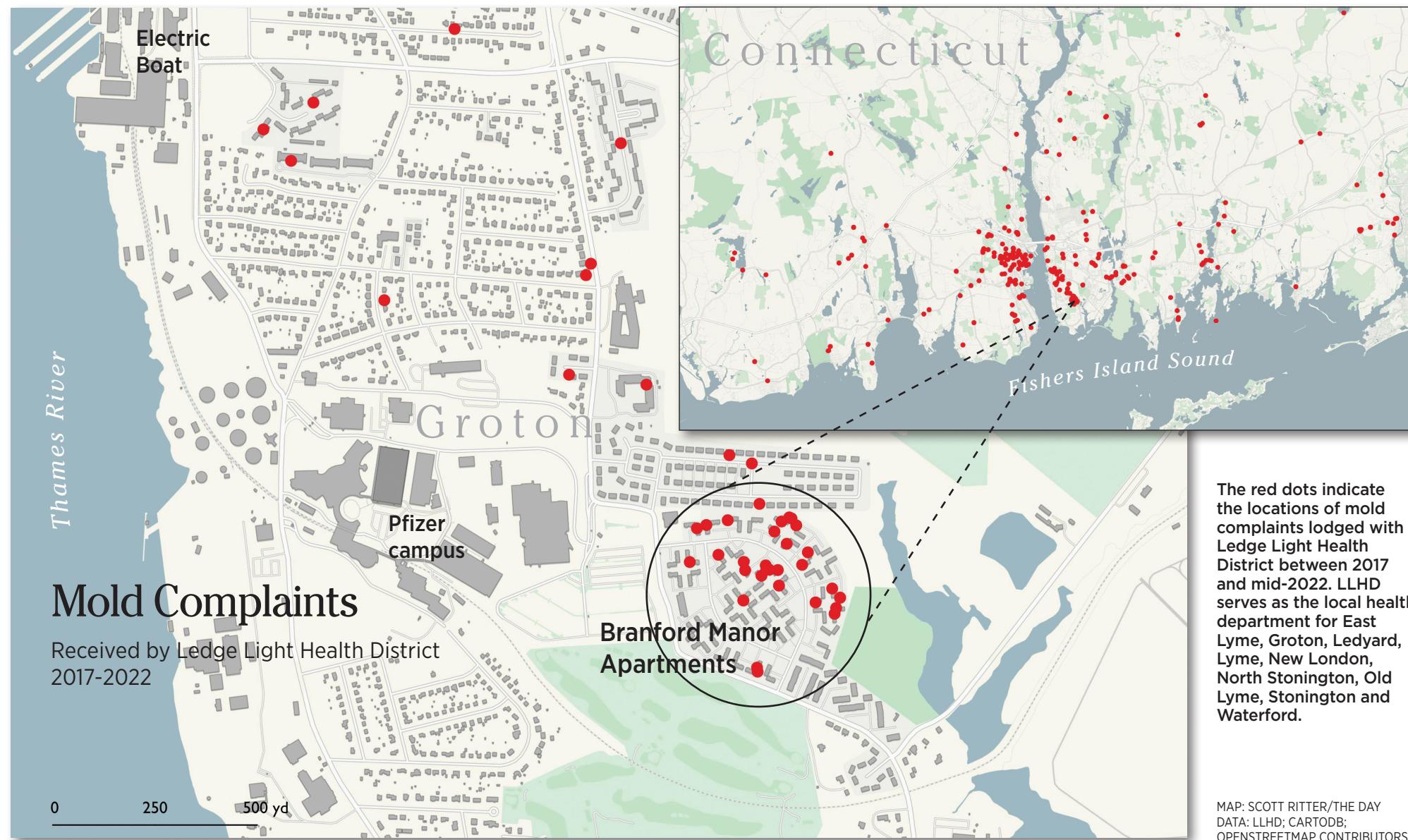
— Bloomberg

#### Back from the wars



FRANCOIS MORI/AP PHOTO  
Horsemen dressed as Napoleonic-era French soldiers perform Sunday during the Imperial Jubilee of Napoleon, in Rueil Malmaison outside Paris.





MAP: SCOTT RITTER/THE DAY  
DATA: LLHD; CARTODB;  
OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS

## Renters say mold problems often ignored

### FROM A1

mold. She said her 12-year-old son had hives from "head to toe" due to a mold allergy. She worries her 14-year-old son won't be able to pursue his dream career as an NBA player due to long-lasting health effects of mold.

### HOUSING LAB

#### *The Crisis*

Branford Manor, which has 442 units in townhouse-style buildings, is also a HUD-subsidized property. It is run by the private company Related Management Company, which is based in New York City. Data from Ledge Light Health District's complaint logs shows an increase in Branford Manor renters reporting mold issues in 2022, with 15 complaints on May 10 alone.

Another resident of Branford Manor, Christina Rotharmel, said she has mold growing inside of her pill bottle caps. She said she spent 29 days in Yale New Haven Hospital's intensive care unit due to what she claims are respiratory issues linked to mold exposure. Rotharmel said she has pulmonary hypertension and other conditions that make her more at risk for mold reactions.

She finds herself "googling" her health symptoms such as her hand tremors and headaches to see if they are consistent with mold exposure symptoms. Oftentimes, she finds they are.

Mold exposure can become a "very serious health problem," according to Carrie Redlich, a pulmonary and environmental physician from Lawrence + Memorial Hospital. She said mold exposure can aggravate preexisting asthma in adults and is thought by many specialists to cause asthma in children.

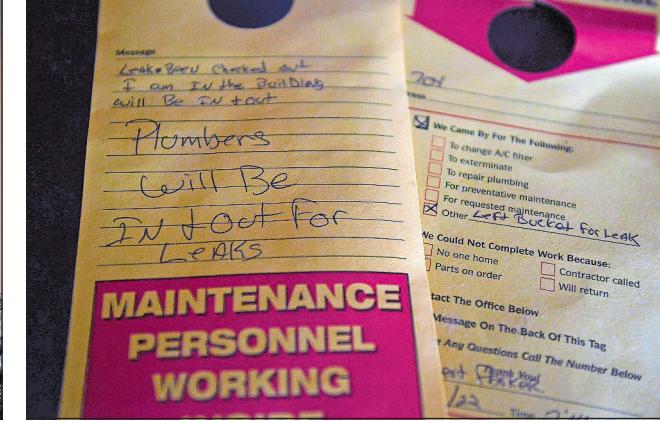
The National Institutes of Health said the home environment "plays a role" in children developing asthma, and that often removing mold from homes improves children's asthma.

Mold exposure can also lead to breathing difficulties, skin irritation, dizziness, and coughing, according to the state Department of Public Health. Redlich said people who are at most risk of reacting to mold are children and people with respiratory conditions and immune-compromising conditions.

Rotharmel said when she sent her primary physician a picture of the mold growing behind the cabinet in her kitchen, the doctor said "word-for-word" that if she "didn't get out of there," she was "going to die."

However, Rotharmel could not permanently leave Branford Manor because she could not afford to move anywhere else. She contends the management uses tenants' desperation for housing as leverage to discourage them from speaking up about mold.

"I feel threatened," Rotharmel said about the manage-



Barbara Templin, top, looks at water stains on the ceiling as she walks through the common room of the Williams Park Apartments. Maintenance notes, above right, left at Templin's apartment. Cheryl Haase, above left, environmental technician with the Ledge Light Health District, finds ceiling mold during an inspection at a home in New London.

ment at Branford Manor. "If you don't do what they say, you get an eviction notice. They hold all the cards."

Rotharmel said she did not report her mold at the peak of the problem because she was focused on managing her health issues with doctors. She also said it "took a lot of courage" to speak up about Branford Manor.

#### Tenants united over mold

After joining the Branford Manor tenants' union and speaking up about mold, Tejeda and her sons have been worried about eviction. She did not want reporters to visit her apartment during business hours in case Branford Manor's management saw on the security cameras.

"Every time I see a notice taped on my door, I panic that it could be an eviction," said Tejeda. "If I lose my home, me and my kids, we're in the streets."

Tejeda and her family have lived in a homeless shelter in the Bronx, N.Y., and she doesn't want her children to experience that again. Breaking down in tears, Tejeda said she never wanted her sons to face these "adult problems" during their childhood.

"I moved to Branford to give

them a better life," Tejeda said. "As a New Yorker, you have no choice but to grow up fast. I didn't want that for them. But now I'm in a situation where I'm wondering, 'Did I make the right choice?' Because they are getting sick."

Tejeda said the management at Branford Manor has had limited and condescending communication regarding her situation.

When Tejeda had complained about mold in the past, she said management workers told her Branford Manor was a "starter home," and she shouldn't be complaining. After months of complaining about mold, she said Branford Manor moved her family into a hotel with three hours notice.

Tejeda said she received a call from her lawyer on July 8 that Branford Manor was moving her family to Hampton Inn in Groton. She packed for her three sons but did not have enough time to pack clothes for herself. Branford Manor told Tejeda's lawyer they were taking that time to remediate the mold in her basement.

When Tejeda complained about her family living in a hotel room for weeks this past summer, she said management told her, "This is a vacation for you."

"The health and safety of residents continues to be our top priority as we work to rectify the issues raised at Branford Manor," a spokesperson for Branford Manor Apartments wrote via email in July. "We appreciate residents' patience and cooperation during this time."

While living in the hotel, Tejeda said her sons did not experience the mold exposure symptoms they had in Branford Manor. She said she visited her apartment while living in the hotel and the smell of the mold was so intense that she began having chest pains. The family has since moved back into their apartment, but Tejeda, reached by phone this past week, said the mold problem has not been resolved.

#### Candles to mask mold odor

Hayden cleans the mold in his shower vent once a month. Tejeda said she uses tropical-scented wall plugs to cover the smell of mold in her apartment, and uses mosquito nets in the door frames during the summer so she can keep the doors open to increase ventilation. Rotharmel scrubs the mold that she finds in her apartment with bleach.

Barbara Templin, who lives two floors above Hayden in

the Williams Park apartments, said sewage leaked onto her living room ceiling. She said she masks the smells of sewage and mold by placing a mint eucalyptus candle under the leak.

Although Hayden, Tejeda, Rotharmel, and Templin feel unhealthy from the living situations they are in, they said they work to make their apartments "home."

Both Tejeda and Hayden said they viewed their affordable housing apartments as a "blessing." However, Hayden says he no longer thinks this way after his health issues from mold and mistreatment of management.

"I am sad living here. I'm grateful for the affordable roof over my head, but I feel I'm paying for it in ways other than money," Hayden wrote in a letter reporting abuse in Williams Park Apartments. He wrote this letter with hope that someone would read his story and help him leave his living situation. He sent the letter to HUD and Williams Park Apartments, and posted it on Twitter.

Until someone responds to his letter, Hayden said he will continue to line the clumps of mold along the rim of his bathroom sink.

### Advice for tenants who find mold

#### Determine the cause of mold

Mold can be caused by leaking pipes, lack of ventilation, and roof and foundation leaks. Finding the source of mold can be helpful for preventing more mold from growing and for asking that the mold problem be resolved by the property owner.

#### Ask for a home assessment

Asking for a mold assessment from a local health department can help renters determine how much mold is in their household. Mold can grow behind walls, under floors, and in other unexpected places. Having an environmental and health professional involved can help renters address the entire mold issue. During assessments, many inspectors give renters contacts and advice on how to best address their specific problem.

#### Skip testing for type of mold

Many types of mold can cause symptoms and all mold should be removed from a household immediately. Testing to determine the type of mold in a household requires expenses for at-home kits or hiring specialists to conduct testing.

#### Keep a record of everything

Health department assessment notes, photographs, mold levels, landlord communication, medical records, and doctors notes regarding mold should be saved so the renter will have evidence of a mold issue when asking that the issue be resolved.

#### Continue paying rent

Some tenants stop paying their rent because they are living in an environment with mold. However, not paying rent can end in eviction, which can hurt the tenant even more.

#### Prevent more mold from growing

Use ventilation to prevent humid air from getting trapped inside the home by keeping doors and windows open and using fans. Using cleaning products and bleach on mold regularly can clean existing mold.

Sources: Cheryl Haase, environmental technician for Ledge Light Health District; Carrie Redlich, environmental and pulmonary physician at Yale New Haven Hospital; Katie Baldwin, supervisor of regulated facilities and housing at Ledge Light Health District; Jennifer Muggeo, deputy director for Ledge Light Health District