

Attorney for Students warns about the predatory renting practices of San Marcos apartments

By Maci Gambrell

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SAN MARCOS- Walking into her new apartment last fall, Texas State sophomore Kate Maddison, 20, of San Marcos, was unexpectedly faced with the musty smell of rotting wood. Confused, she scoured her new home until she found the source, small spots of mold on the back patio, bedroom, kitchen, living room and stairs in her unit. Without her knowing, she had signed a lease to live in an apartment completely infested with mold.

“We were talking to maintenance about it and took them forever to actually get to it, so we got the city involved instead and the city was the only one that actually wanted to help,” Maddison said. “And so, they came in and ripped out our whole ceiling, so we got moved to the showroom... then the mold actually came back because they didn't really solve the problem.”

Maddison's experience is not unique, many student renters in San Marcos have expressed concerns with the various problems they've had navigating the city's complex leasing system. This includes Texas State senior Andy Page, 20, of San Marcos, who thinks student housing apartments in the area take advantage of their tenants.

"I wish I would've known that they'd screw us over," Page said. "[The apartments] don't care about us at all and we've continually had issues with maintenance and the management.”

Attorney for Students (AFS) at Texas State University, Kama Davis, agrees many apartment complexes in San Marcos implement predatory practices on their tenants. AFS advises students to read the fine print of documents, learn the different types of leases, sign security deposits and get renters insurance, so students can protect themselves against apartment companies. Davis said her organization offers legal counsel to Texas State students to help them avoid getting into a bad lease or rental agreement like Maddison and Page.

"I want you to be savvy consumers, know where your money is going, know who's giving you the information, and know what's going to be happening on a day-to-day basis," Davis said. "I'm not here to tell you what to do. I'm just here to give you information so you can decide what's best for yourself."

According to Davis, the city has a history of being overbuilt with apartments, however apartment complexes are still pressuring students to sign leases quickly. For instance, in 2021, there were 27,000 beds available to rent, which was about 7,000 more than needed to house the entire student population in San Marcos. However, the city did not calculate this information, AFS did. This lack of data allows students to believe marketing schemes apartments use because they don't have the information to discern the truth.

"We don't need more rent by bed apartments here, because we are already built on that, Davis said. "So, there is a miscommunication about what the actual supply is and what the actual demand is."

Davis says that issues with apartment complex leasing are only escalating. The city will continue to approve new development of student apartments as enrollment continues to rise at Texas State University. This will make stories like Texas State University senior, Andy Page, more common, as an increased number of students will experience similar predatory practices. He hopes for a change in a system he feels is hurting him and other students.

"We didn't have a kitchen for an entire month because of mold and our water was shut off for two days without reason," Page said.

"I just wish that these places weren't so money-hungry and taking advantage of young people who don't necessarily understand what they're getting themselves into."

For more information, students can visit AFS website, attorney.dos.txst.edu and meet with an advisor to review apartment leases and make informed decisions about their future housing.