



National Safe and Healthy
Housing Coalition

November 16, 2009

The Honorable xxx
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator xxx:

**PROVISIONAL STEERING
COMMITTEE**

- Alliance for Healthy Homes
- American Public Health Association
- American Society of Home Inspectors
- Association of State/Territories Health Officials
- Children's Health Forum
- Enterprise Community Partners
- Home Safety Council
- National Association of Realtors®
- National Center for Healthy Housing, Chair
- National Low Income Housing Coalition
- NeighborWorks America
- Rebuilding Together
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission to Build a Healthier America
- Sustainable Community Development
- U.S. Green Building Council

The undersigned public health, housing, environmental, and children's organizations strongly support the Healthy Housing Council Act of 2009 (S. 1658) introduced by Senators Reed (D-RI), Johanns (R-NE), Boxer (D-CA), Merkeley (D-OR) and Franken (D-MN). We are also writing to urge you to join Senator Reed in reintroducing S. 3654 (the Research, Hazard Intervention, and National Outreach for Healthier Homes Act of 2008).

The home is the most dangerous place for U.S. families, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Six million Americans live in housing that rivals the conditions in developing countries, with broken heating and plumbing, holes in walls and windows, roaches, rats, falling plaster, and leaking roofs. Millions more in all 50 states live in housing with serious health and safety hazards caused by lead-based paint, radon, mold, exposed wiring, unvented heaters, toxic chemicals, broken stairs, and missing smoke detectors, according to the *State of the Nation's Healthy Housing* (see www.nchh.org).

Numerous studies show that these hazards kill tens of thousands of Americans annually, cause millions of illnesses and injuries, and cost taxpayers, employers and families hundreds of billions in health care treatments and lost productivity. Children, the elderly, minorities, low-income households, and other vulnerable populations bear the brunt of this unnecessary burden.

Many of these problems can be eliminated by simple, low-cost fixes like carbon monoxide alarms and grab bars to prevent elders from falling. Yet Congress has never tried to address this problem systematically at its origin – the house itself – despite the huge costs borne by Medicare, Medicaid and several other federal assistance programs to treat the resulting diseases and injuries. The *Healthy Housing Council Act* takes the obvious first step of simply getting HUD, EPA, CDC and other federal agencies with piecemeal responsibilities for individual home hazards to more effectively align and coordinate, at a cost of less than \$1 million a year.

The *Research, Hazard Intervention, and National Outreach for Healthier Homes Act* is the first multi-pronged bill to improve federal research in this area, enhance the capacity of current federal programs, and expand national outreach efforts. Specifically, it:

- Provides \$10 million for existing federal housing programs, such as CDBG, HOME and LIHEAP, to add healthy homes components.
- Leverages the private market interest in healthy homes by creating a voluntary “Healthy Homes Seal of Approval” modeled after the successful Energy Star program.

- Authorizes \$7.0 million/year for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and CDC to evaluate the human health risks and effects of indoor exposure to chemical pollutants, including carbon monoxide, asthma triggers, and common household and garden pesticides.
- Authorizes \$6.0 million for HUD to study methods for assessing and controlling these hazards.
- Provides \$10.0 million to HUD and CDC to study the indoor environmental quality of existing housing and to create a system for monitoring housing related hazards.

We applaud your efforts to begin tackling this nationwide problem with a common sense approach, and we look forward to working with you on these critically important bills.

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact me at (443) 539-4159 or rmorley@nchh.org. Thank you.

Respectfully,

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Executive Director
National Association of County and City Health Officials

cc: The Honorable Jack Reed
The Honorable Jeff Merkley
The Honorable Mike Johanns
The Honorable Barbara Boxer
The Honorable Al Franken