

Honorable Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen, Chair, House Appropriations Committee  
Honorable Congresswoman Nita Lowey, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee

May 25, 2017

Dear Chair Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Lowey:

The dangers lead poses to our children are well established, and support for efforts to combat lead exposure have long held bipartisan support. Yet, the Administration's proposed budget on childhood lead poisoning drastically reduces funding for key programs at HUD, CDC, and EPA. In the wake of the tragedies in Flint, East Chicago, and elsewhere, this is not the time to reduce lead poisoning prevention funding—it is the time to meet the need.

In its FY18 budget deliberations, we urge Congress to fund lead poisoning prevention programs for each of these three agencies:

- HUD's lead hazard control and healthy homes program should be funded at \$230 million.
- CDC's program for lead surveillance should be funded at \$50 million.
- EPA's programs for lead hazard reduction and categorical grants for renovation, repair, and painting should be funded at a total of \$25 million.

We represent thousands of parents, business leaders, professionals, and organizations working to end childhood lead poisoning, advance educational outcomes, and reduce long-term public and private costs. Lead causes neurological damage, behavior problems, and undermines children's long-term learning, earnings, and health.

The nation's efforts to address childhood lead poisoning are led by HUD, CDC, and EPA, each with their own strengths and coordinated duties. This three-legged stool has worked well, and childhood blood lead levels have declined by over 90% since the 1990s. In brief, HUD funds abatement, CDC funds surveillance and case management, and EPA funds programs aimed at ensuring safe renovation, repair, painting, and abatement.

However, with over half a million children who still have high blood lead levels, with 6-10 million families relying on lead water pipes, and with 23 million homes with deteriorated lead paint, lead dust, or lead-contaminated soil, there is much more to be done. Without providing adequate resources, we as a nation will simply be forced to react to each new lead crisis, continuing to pay over \$50 billion annually in avoidable lead poisoning costs. Instead of drastic cuts to and even elimination of these programs, Congress should deliver on the nation's promise to end lead poisoning.

## **HUD**

At HUD, Secretary Ben Carson promised at his confirmation hearings to "enhance" Lead Poisoning Prevention and Healthy Homes, and the President's budget has proposed to increase the budget for that program from \$110 million to \$130 million; but because of proposed cuts elsewhere, HUD will actually have fewer dollars for lead hazard control, not more. For example, the President's proposed HUD

budget eliminates the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, cuts public housing maintenance and capital improvements, and eliminates or cuts other home repair programs, all of which will increase lead hazards due to fewer resources. Many local jurisdictions use CDBG to provide their local “match” funding, anywhere from 10% - 25%, for lead hazard control grants. Eliminating CDBG means that fewer jurisdictions will be able to apply for lead hazard control grants. Furthermore, public housing funds are used to address lead hazards in both the near term and the long-term; and the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), another source of lead hazard control funding, is also slated for elimination. In short, the Administration’s overall proposed HUD budget will decrease funding for lead poisoning prevention, putting children at needless risk.

Instead of increasing lead poisoning prevention funding with one hand but taking away much more with the other, we urge Congress to increase funding for the HUD lead poisoning program to \$230 million; we also urge Congress to ensure that lead abatement is part of the budget for infrastructure improvements; and we urge Congress to fully fund CDBG, HOME, and public housing.

### **CDC**

The Administration’s proposed budget would fund CDC’s Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention program, which is currently funded at \$17 million, well below the \$50 million needed. CDC’s lead and healthy homes program conducts needed surveillance of children exposed to lead, provides national data on childhood lead poisoning, ensures that children receive necessary case management, and enables local jurisdictions to take action before children are exposed to lead instead of reacting only after they have been harmed. Screening and surveillance data currently provide the foundation for targeting community prevention activities to areas where the risk is highest. However, many states and local jurisdictions have antiquated data systems due to inadequate funding. These systems must be modernized and standardized, not broken apart by an ill-defined block grant program. Screening and surveillance data are also essential for carrying out needed follow-up services for children affected by lead. These services include identification and removal of lead sources, adequate nutrition, and education and behavioral services to support the development of those affected by lead. We urge Congress to fund CDC’s lead poisoning prevention and healthy homes program at \$50 million.

### **EPA**

At EPA, an internal detailed budget memorandum calls for the elimination of the Lead Risk Reduction Program and the Lead Categorical Grants program to states, which are currently funded at \$2.6 million and \$14 million, respectively. These programs are critical to protecting the nation’s children from lead poisoning. This contradicts the very goal stated by the President to repair crumbling communities and lift the trajectory of America’s families. These programs support science-based standards used to define what lead hazards are in order to protect pregnant women and vulnerable children; they require lead-safe work practices during renovation, repair, and painting work; and they ensure that consumers seeking lead inspection, abatement, and risk assessment services can find qualified, trained individuals to perform the work properly. We urge Congress to fund these two programs at a total of \$25 million.

**Investment in Lead Poisoning Prevention Saves Taxpayer Money**

Taxpayers already absorb the economic costs of childhood lead poisoning, estimated at \$50.9 billion per year. And families, children, property owners and managers, schools, local governments, and communities across the country bear the social, educational, and medical costs of children with learning disabilities, brain damage, aggressive behavior, and long-term health problems. For every dollar spent on controlling lead hazards, taxpayers see a return of at least \$17. Countless studies have demonstrated this high return on investment. One needs to look no further than the Flint tragedy—a tragedy caused by a shortsighted scheme, supposedly to save money that will in fact cost millions more to clean up—to see that programs at HUD, CDC, and EPA that protect our children should be among the nation’s top priorities. It makes good business sense; it makes good housing, public health, and environmental policy; and it’s the right thing to do.

We urge you to enable the critical contribution each of these three agencies makes to the children of the United States to continue by ensuring that HUD, CDC, and EPA receive the necessary funding to carry out their duties. Our children deserve no less.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact Dr. David E. Jacobs of the National Safe and Healthy Housing Coalition at [dave@nshhcoalition.org](mailto:dave@nshhcoalition.org) if we can be of further assistance.

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Honorable Ken Calvert, Chair, House Interior/Environment Appropriations Subcommittee  
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