

Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
Honorable Patrick Leahy, Vice Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee

November 22, 2017

Dear Chair Cochran and Vice Chair Leahy:

We urge Congress to fund healthy homes and childhood lead poisoning prevention programs.

Healthy homes programs are about safe, decent, and sanitary housing as a means for preventing disease and injury. The scientific evidence for connections between housing hazards and health outcomes, such as lead poisoning and asthma, is clear, as are the means to remediate the problem. For example, a recent report from Pew Charitable Trusts on lead poisoning shows that we can save over \$80 billion if we protect children born in 2018 alone and billions more for children born in later years. And home-based asthma visits save more than \$2 for every dollar invested and help protect thousands of children.

Yet, the Administration's proposed budget on healthy homes, including childhood lead poisoning, drastically reduces funding for key programs at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In the wake of the tragedies in Flint, East Chicago, and elsewhere, and with an eye to the healthy housing needs after the disasters of hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, federal healthy housing programs are needed more than ever.

In its FY18 budget deliberations, we urge Congress to fund healthy homes programs at HUD, CDC, and EPA:

- At **HUD**, the lead hazard control and healthy homes program should be funded at \$230 million.
- At **CDC**, the healthy homes and lead poisoning prevention program should be funded at \$50 million, the asthma control program at \$29 million, and the environmental public health tracking network at \$40 million.
- At **EPA**, programs for lead hazard reduction, radon, and indoor air, as well as categorical grants for radon and lead, should be level-funded from FY17 at a total of \$58.5 million.

We represent thousands of parents, business leaders, professionals, and organizations working to end childhood lead poisoning, advance healthy homes, and end the unnecessary impact of poor housing conditions on 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 agency's work provides different strengths, and this coordinated effort has worked well. As a result, childhood blood lead levels have declined by over 90% since the 1990s.

However, to this day in America, there are still:

- 400 deaths annually from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning, costing the U.S. \$500 million
- 21,000 deaths annually from radon-related lung cancer, costing the U.S. \$2.9 billion
- 27,000 deaths annually from unintentional falls among older adults, with all fatal unintentional home injuries costing the U.S. \$34 billion
- Over half a million children who still have high blood lead levels and 23 million homes with deteriorated lead paint, lead dust, or lead-contaminated soil, costing the U.S. \$50 billion a year
- 24.6 million people with asthma, costing the U.S. \$63 billion a year

Clearly, there is much more to be done. If we do not rise to meet these needs, we as a nation will simply be forced to react to each new case and each new crisis, continuing to pay a staggering social and financial toll.

HUD: We were grateful to see an increase in funding for HUD's **Office of Lead Poisoning Prevention and Healthy Homes** in FY17 from \$110 to \$145 million. We are further appreciative of the Senate Appropriation Committee's continued increase of this program to \$160 million. HUD estimates that 265,000 more children would be lead poisoned without this office's actions to control hazards in homes. We urge Congress to continue this work and further increase funding 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 continue to fully fund CDBG, HOME, Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8), and public housing, as many states and localities use those funding streams to match HUD lead poisoning prevention grants or for other healthy housing efforts.

CDC: CDC's **Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention 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. This program has been funded for several years at \$17 million, which is far too little to conduct adequate surveillance in all 50 states. We urge Congress to fund this program at **\$50 million**.

CDC's **National Asthma Control Program** funds states, localities, and other organizations to improve asthma surveillance, awareness, and education. Since its inception, the program has supported asthma control programs in 34 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico; asthma death rates have decreased by 27%; and costs due to asthma illness and death have decreased by \$23.1 billion. We urge Congress to support the continuation of this important work and level-fund this program at **\$29 million**.

CDC's **National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program** supports environmental public health tracking and data networks in 25 states and one city. These program has 19 datasets, 96 indicators, and 379 health measures ranging from asthma to drinking water quality and carbon monoxide exposure. To date, state and local health officials have used the Tracking Network over 225 times to prevent sickness and death. We urge Congress to increase funding for this program from **\$34 to 40 million**, which would allow the program to fund three additional states.

EPA: EPA's **Lead Categorical Grant** and **Lead Risk Reduction Program** are key to the nation's work on childhood lead poisoning prevention. Through funding for states and EPA regional offices, 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 (RRP) 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 level-fund these programs at **\$14.049 million** and **\$13.257 million** respectively.

EPA's **Radon Categorical Grant**, **Indoor Air: Radon**, and **Reduce Risk from Indoor Air** programs work to protect residents from health risks associated with indoor air, including radon, which is found in basements and is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S., asthma triggers located in the home, and mold, which is a particular concern in the aftermath of flooding. We urge Congress to level-fund these programs at **\$8.051 million**, **\$2.91 million**, and **\$13.733 million** respectively.

EPA's **Children and Other Sensitive Populations: Agency Coordination** effort ensures that agency programs protect children's environmental health, including work on developing regulations, improving science policy, implementing programs at the community level, and measuring progress on children's health. We urge Congress to level-fund this program at **\$6.548 million**.

The National Safe and Healthy Housing Coalition is a broad, voluntary coalition of over 300 organizations working to improve housing conditions nationwide. The coalition promotes policies for safe and healthy housing in the United States, with special emphasis on those who are disproportionately impacted. Congress has an obligation protect the most vulnerable of its citizens, its children, and the elderly, and that is what this funding does. These vital programs must continue to be fully funded in order to support healthy housing for all.

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

Sincerely,

Dr. David E. Jacobs
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Columbia, MD

cc: Honorable Susan Collins, Chair, Senate HUD Appropriations Subcommittee
Honorable Jack Reed, Ranking member, Senate HUD Appropriations Subcommittee

Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chair, Senate Interior/Environment Appropriations Subcommittee
Honorable Tom Udall, Ranking Member, Senate Interior/Environment Appropriations Subcommittee

Honorable Roy Blunt, Chair, HHS Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
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