



The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

December XX, 2023

Dear Chair Granger and Ranking Member DeLauro,

On behalf of the National Safe and Healthy Housing Coalition and the attached signatories, we write to urge you to protect funding for healthy homes programs at HUD, CDC, and EPA in any FY24 omnibus package.

Across the country, millions of families are living in unhealthy housing conditions, struggling with issues like broken heating and plumbing systems, damaged or leaking roofs, mold, exposed wiring, and toxic chemicals. **Overall, 40% of U.S. homes have at least one significant health or safety risk that places American families at risk.** Millions of Americans are affected by these issues, including 25 million children and adults with asthma, 590,000 children with elevated blood lead levels, 36,500 older adults who die from falls, 21,000 people who die from radon-related lung cancer, and 400 people who die from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning each year. Additionally, access to a safe and healthy home is a racial equity issue; for example, Black Americans are nearly twice as likely to live in homes with severe physical problems when compared to the general population, and Black children are more likely to be exposed to lead, more likely to have and die from asthma, and are at increased risk for injuries at home.

The devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated the connection between housing quality and health outcomes, how these impacts disproportionately affect specific populations including communities of color and low-income communities, and the necessity of investing in addressing healthy housing hazards and poor housing quality. As the country continues to recover from COVID-19, significant funding is still needed to increase housing affordability and stability, fix substandard housing, and provide innovative, flexible, and equitable services to those impacted by healthy housing hazards. **In particular, funding must be maintained or increased for the following programs:**

Department of Housing and Urban Development

- **Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes (OLHCHH).** This office has directly addressed lead and other housing-related health hazards over the last three decades through programs that treat individual units for lead hazards, improve lead safety with enforcement actions, and upgrade substandard housing with healthy homes improvements. Recent increases in funding have allowed the office to provide new grants to state and local programs, awarding nearly \$400 million in grants since 2021 to communities across 44 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

The House FY24 bill includes some changes that would help the office continue to expand and modernize to meet needs on the ground, including increased funding for the Healthy Homes Program, support of a new pilot program to facilitate new financing mechanisms to address lead remediation and other healthy homes issues, and harmonizing income eligibility requirements of OLHCHH programs with other federal programs, including other HUD programs, the Weatherization Assistance Program, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and supportive services for veteran families at the VA. We would also support additional flexibility in this funding that would allow grantees to be able to support code enforcement, proactive rental inspections, and workforce development. Increasing flexibility on matching funds could also be used to fix code violations or other health and safety hazards as counting toward the match requirement even if the funding doesn't directly address lead. Cuts and recissions to this program proposed in both the Senate and House FY24 bills could stymie this progress and would severely limit several of the office's smaller programs. **Funding for this office should at least be maintained at the FY23 level of \$410 million and preferably increased to \$810 million, with funding specifically included for programs that mitigate radon in public housing, prevent falls among older adults, and support research into healthy housing and lead poisoning prevention methods and interventions.**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- **Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program.** This program provides grants to 61 states, cities, territories, and counties. It 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. This is especially important after the reduction of the blood lead reference value from 5 to 3.5 µg/dL, doubling the number of children needing these services, and after screening rates dropped during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Funding for this program should at least be maintained at the FY23 level of \$51 million and preferably increased to \$100 million.**
- **National Asthma Control Program.** This program funds states, territories, localities, and other organizations to improve asthma surveillance, awareness, and education. The program currently supports asthma control programs in 25 states and jurisdictions. The current funding level for this program represents an average of just \$1.17 invested in asthma prevention for each of the 26.5 million Americans living with asthma. In contrast, between 2012 and 2018, an average of \$3.5 billion per year was paid by Medicaid just for asthma inhalers. Statewide asthma coalitions, funded by NACP, are one of the most direct and measurable ways that human, financial, and organizational resources are leveraged. **Funding for this program should at least be maintained at the FY23 level of \$33.5 million and preferably increased to \$70 million.**
- **National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program.** This program supports environmental public health tracking and data networks in 31 states, one city, and one county, and hosts 20 datasets, 107 indicators, and 419 health measures ranging from asthma to drinking water quality and carbon monoxide exposure, which are used by state and local health officials to prevent sickness and death. **Funding for this program should at least be maintained at the**

FY23 level of \$34 million and preferably increased to \$65 million, which would allow CDC to expand and fund all 50 states at full capacity.

Environmental Protection Agency

- **Categorical Grant: Lead and Lead Risk Reduction Programs.** 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 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. Communities require more resources to address the needs of lead-poisoned children, especially a fully trained workforce to carry out lead abatement and lead-safe work practices; funding these programs will increase training availability, and we encourage Congress and EPA to focus on training needs for local code enforcement officers, who are often tasked with identifying hazards in the home and enforcing housing quality standards. **Funding for these programs should be increased to \$50 million and \$16 million, respectively.**
- **Categorical Grant: Radon, Indoor Air: Radon, and Reduce Risk from Indoor Air Programs.** These programs work to protect residents from health risks associated with indoor air, including asthma triggers located in the home, mold (a particular concern in the aftermath of flooding), and radon. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S. As awareness of radon as a public health issue has increased, the demand for radon mitigation services is also expected to increase. **Funding for these programs should be increased to \$17 million, \$5 million, and \$47 million, respectively.**
- **Children and Other Sensitive Populations: Agency Coordination.** This program 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. The incidence of asthma and a number of other chronic diseases is increasing nationwide. Therefore, more resources are needed to address the needs of these sensitive populations. **Funding for this program should be increased to \$8 million.**

The National Safe and Healthy Housing Coalition is a broad coalition of over 400 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. These vital programs must be funded in order to support healthy housing for all.

Thank you for your consideration of our request and for your continued support of lead poisoning prevention and healthy homes.

Please contact Sarah Goodwin at sarah@nshhcoalition.org if we can provide further information.

Sincerely,

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Issaquah, WA

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