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Interested Party Testimony for HB 110
Tim Johnson, Policy Advocate
Ohio Poverty Law Center
Ohio House Finance Committee
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Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee, my name is Tim Johnson, and I am a policy advocate for the Ohio Poverty Law Center and a member of the Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition Leadership Team. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony on House Bill 110 specifically the lead poisoning prevention provisions of the biennial budget.

Lead is a powerful neurotoxin that has devastating lifelong effects on young children. There is no safe level of lead in a child's blood and there is no cure for lead poisoning. While the country and the state has made some progress toward decreasing the number of children who are lead poisoned, it remains a significant problem. Over two-third of Ohio homes were built before 1978 which means they have potential lead hazards, and over 425,000 of these homes are occupied with children who are under the age of 6. Childhood lead poisoning is an issue in every corner of our state, but many homes with lead hazards are in areas that have been the victim of systemic disinvestment, and children of color are the ones who bear the brunt of childhood lead poisoning.

If we hope to see a day in which all Ohio children can live lead free, it is critical that our state shift its efforts to primary prevention. Currently, when a child is found to have elevated levels of lead in their blood, an investigation is done to find the lead hazards a child has encountered and a lead hazard control order is issued to have the lead hazard abated or controlled. Unfortunately, this only occurs after a child has been poisoned by lead. Primary prevention seeks to control and abate lead hazards before a child is ever poisoned. One of the state's most important primary prevention tools is the SCHIP Lead Abatement Program.

The SCHIP Lead Abatement Program currently allows for homes with lead hazards to be abated for Medicaid households with pregnant women or children under 6 years old. SCHIP has been highly successful, performing lead abatement activities in over 61 counties. The program, however, is currently over-extended; the current budget for SCHIP only allows for 125 households each year to be abated. There is a significant waitlist and there are not enough resources to keep up with demand. We are asking that the general assembly increase the funding from \$5 million each fiscal year to \$10 million each fiscal year. Doubling the funding will allow the program to expand its reach to more communities and allow the state to focus on primary prevention so that we are no longer waiting for kids to become lead poisoned before we act.

Governor DeWine has also allocated \$7.15 million in each fiscal year for lead poisoning prevention. Up to \$5 million in each fiscal year will go to a first of its kind program to award grants and contracts to help local communities receive funding for lead poisoning prevention efforts. There are many communities

that recognize the benefit of lead poisoning prevention initiatives but lack the funds to begin the process. Each community faces their own unique challenges, and the grant program will allow localities to utilize funding in the way that best fits their needs. We are hopeful that the grant program will represent the beginning of a fruitful partnership between state and local governments on lead poisoning prevention and we ask you maintain this funding in the budget.

Lead poisoning is a serious issue, but it is also preventable. By working to eliminate lead hazards we can create an Ohio where no child suffers from the harmful effects of lead poisoning. A lead-free Ohio will not happen overnight, but the Governor's budget creates solid foundation for us to build a brighter future for our children.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I stand willing to work with each of you to make Ohio a state free of childhood lead poisoning.