

Testimony on H.B. 110
House Finance, Health Subcommittee
By Fred Strahorn
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Thank you, Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West and committee members for giving me an opportunity to testify before you today on H.B. 110, the state budget bill. I am here on behalf of the Ohio Healthy Homes Network (OHHN) which is a non-profit organization engaged in advocacy to promote healthy, safe and affordable housing. Our organization's work is centered around indoor air quality with a particular focus on lead poisoning prevention and safety. OHHN is part of a network of non-profit organizations that work throughout the state on housing issues.

Today, I am here as an interested party to give testimony on OHHN's position regarding the lead safety provisions included in the Governor's Executive Budget.

Lead is a naturally occurring element that can be found in water, air, soil, and consumer products. Exposure to lead can result in poisoning when it accumulates in a person's bones and soft tissue. Lead poisoning can cause numerous health challenges, including abdominal pain, vision and hearing loss, seizures, cognitive and developmental delays, behavior changes, and even death.

Lead-based paint and its dust are the most common source of lead poisoning. Lead was commonly added to interior and exterior paint in the United States and Europe for centuries. In 1978, the United States government banned the use of lead paint in residential settings. Though lead paint is not used today, it is still found in many homes built prior to 1978.

In Ohio, much of our housing stock was constructed before lead-based paint was prohibited. In fact, more than two-thirds of homes in Ohio were built before 1980, and more than 25% were constructed before 1950. If you were to take Cuyahoga County and the City of Cleveland, as much as 80% of the housing stock was constructed before 1950 (Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, "Lead Poisoning and the Children of Cuyahoga County").

In Ohio today, it is estimated that roughly 3.5 million houses exist with some type of lead contamination, about 435,000 of those homes are occupied by children under the age of 6 and about 200,000 of them in low-income families. The health risks that lead poses to families, in general, are serious but in the instance of children it is particularly grave.

While lead poisoning can affect individuals of all ages, children are at greatest risk. Children's bodies absorb lead more efficiently than adults, and they are less able to detoxify their bodies of lead. Infants and toddlers are developmentally programmed for mouthing behavior. Small children learn new sensations, objects, and experiences through hand-to-mouth and object-to-mouth behaviors. This is normal up to 2 years of age. Children may consume lead paint that is peeling or chipping or through other products containing lead, such as toys. Additionally, as children crawl, they can collect lead dust on their hands, which is then ingested when they touch their hands to their mouth.

As many of you know, most human brain development occurs in the first 6 years or so of a person's life. If damage to the brain occurs from lead poisoning during this early developmental period it is

irreversible. And I believe the testimony from the Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition outlines some statistical outcomes for children who have suffered from lead poisoning.

So, for these reasons OHHN is requesting that the Legislature preserve funding for the lead-safety provisions of the budget which include funding for the Lead Abatement Fund [ODH440527]; Lead Safe Home Fund [ODH440530]; H2Ohio [OEPA 715695] which includes funding to remove lead water supply lines; and Early Intervention funding for Lead Poisoned Children for supportive, home-based services for children under 3 years of age who tested positive for elevated blood lead levels [ODD322421].

We would also respectfully request that the Legislature expand the SCHIP Lead Program [ODM651525] funding from \$10M to \$20M for high-risk children to remove lead hazards in homes built before 1978 with children under 6 years of age or pregnant women.

This concludes my testimony. And once again, I want to thank Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West and committee members. At this time, I would be happy to entertain any questions.