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Proponent Party Testimony for HB 33
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Ohio House Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee
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Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Ohio House Finance Sub Committee on Health & Human Services, 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 33, 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. Many states are faced with the complex issue of how to address childhood lead poisoning and Ohio is no different. Over two-third of Ohio homes were built before 1980 which means they have potential lead hazards, and over 427,000 of these homes are occupied with children who are under the age of 6. Ohio has the second highest number of children testing positive for elevated blooded lead levels in the country. 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.

In the face of this overwhelming challenge, credit must be given to both Governor DeWine and members of the Ohio General Assembly. Over the last several years both the Governor and the legislature have made key investments in lead poisoning prevention. The current budget doubled down on proven strategies to reduced lead poisoning while also creating an innovative statewide grant program. The Lead Safe Home fund allows for communities across the state to apply for funding to either expand their existing lead poisoning prevention programs or create new ones. Furthermore, the legislature at the end of the last GA allocated ARPA funds to support lead abatement work as well as building up our lead workforce. I am pleased to say that House Bill 33 is continues to build upon the wise investments made in the current budget and will allow the state to maintain momentum in its fight against childhood lead poisoning.

HB 33, as promised by the Governor, doubles the investment in the lead abatement line item. This line item supports the lead safe home fund currently funding seven projects around the state and supports lead safe work practices in older homes as the state looks to take over enforcement of the renovation, repair and painting rule. It also provides funding to support local delegated health authorities as they prepare to handle the increase caseloads due to the lowering our blood reference level. We ask that you preserve the FY 24-25 funding investments so Ohio can continue its important work.

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. Unfortunately, for far too long our state has been more reactive than proactive, finding and fixing lead hazards 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 73 counties, an increase of 11 counties in two years. The program has abated over 400 homes since its inception. While this is encouraging, there are over **1200 lead hazards control orders** requiring abatement and the program is still stuck abating homes where kids have already been poisoned, rather than abating properties before a child has been poisoned.

Currently the Director of OBM can transfer up to \$5 million dollars each fiscal at the request of the Medicaid Director to be used for the SCHIP Lead Abatement Program. We are asking that the general assembly increase the spending authority to allow for up to \$10 million each fiscal year to be requested and transferred. Additional 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.

Finally, we would encourage the General Assembly to create a position within the newly proposed Department of Children and Youth who would coordinate lead poisoning prevention efforts. While we do not have an opinion on the creation of the Department itself, we do recognize it is tasked with looking after the health and wellbeing of infants through age 5, which is nearly identical to the age range where children are most vulnerable to the effects of lead poisoning. Many different committees and Departments tackle different aspects of lead poisoning prevention, and they would all benefit from having a person oversee the various programs and fostering communications between agencies. Having a position that focuses solely on lead poisoning prevention will ensure continuity and collaboration to maximize the impact of public funds dedicated to lead prevention.

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 HB 33 builds upon an already solid foundation for a brighter future for Ohio children.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you have at this time.