

HB 96 Interested Party Testimony  
Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
Tim Johnson, Senior Policy Advocate  
Ohio Poverty Law Center  
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Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, my name is Tim Johnson, and I am a senior policy advisor with The Ohio Poverty Law Center. Thank you for allowing me to offer interested party testimony on lead poisoning prevention in Substitute House Bill 96, the biennial operating 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-thirds 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 six. Ohio has the second highest number of children testing positive for elevated blooded lead levels in the country.

Addressing lead poisoning prevention requires a long-term commitment which is why we are disappointed that, after supporting Governor DeWine's increased emphasis on lead poisoning prevention over the last two budgets, the Ohio House decided to cut lead poisoning prevention funding by 96%. There is now only half a million dollars over the biennium for the Department of Health to keep children safe from lead. The funding that was cut was used for a variety of different programs and initiatives to combat lead poisoning in our communities including:

- Testing children for elevated blood lead levels
- Conducting lead investigations to identify lead hazards
- Paying exam and licensure fees to create and bolster our lead hazard workforce
- Intervention Services for families of lead poisoned children
- Funding for local communities to start or expand lead poisoning prevention services
- Funding for lead hazard control services to remove lead from homes

Many of these programs will disappear due to the cut in funding and what little might remain will be severely limited in scope.

Childhood lead poisoning is a significant—but fixable—challenge. The Ohio Department of Health has abated more than 500 homes to date and there are more than 200 Ohio families currently waiting for lead hazard control services. If lead poisoning prevention funding is not restored, these families will not receive the services they need to make their homes safe. Cutting funding will not help the state realize cost savings; lead poisoned children will ultimately cost the state more due to the downstream effects associated with lead poisoning. Investing upfront in lead poisoning prevention will save the state money by catching lead poisoned children early and working to mitigate the harmful effects, as well as preventing future children from becoming poisoned in the first place.

Members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, childhood lead poisoning is an issue in every corner of our state, from Lake Erie down to the Ohio River and everywhere in between. Gutting lead poisoning prevention funding does not mean children will no longer be lead poisoned, but it does mean that it will be more difficult to identify when children have been poisoned, it will be harder to fix dangerous lead hazards, and Ohio will not have the lead workforce necessary to the work. Ohio children deserve a future free from lead poisoning and we urge you to support an amendment to restore lead poisoning prevention funding to the levels in the Governor's budget. Thank you for your time, I am happy to answer your questions.