



Substitute House Bill 96 Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee
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May 28, 2025 – Written Submission

Thank you Chair Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Senate Finance Committee members.

My name is Megan Riddlebarger, I am the Executive Director of the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development. We operate Ohio's Center for Lead Abatement (OCLA) under our Ohio Weatherization Training Center. COAD's OCLA is funded to serve approximately 300 training days per year, providing RRP, Lead Abatement, and Risk Assessor courses to hundreds of contractors and weatherization providers across the state.

While we supported the As-Introduced version of HB 96, we join our colleagues at Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition and others who are extremely concerned to see the virtual elimination of Ohio's child lead poisoning prevention programs in the House-passed version of the FY26-27 budget (Sub HB 96), cutting over \$8 million/FY down to \$250,000/FY, gutting critical and effective programs that protect children from lead poisoning.

We urge your support of amendment (SC0324) to restore the lead abatement GRF ALI 440527 to the As-Introduced \$7.1M per fiscal year and the lead safe home fund GRF ALI 440530 to the As-Introduced \$1M per fiscal year.

Maintaining the current state GRF funding is essential to ensuring continued progress in protecting children from lead. Please consider the following:

Children are Exposed to Lead in Every Part of the State

Ohio ranks 2nd in the U.S. in the number of children with elevated blood lead levels – this is twice the national average! 95% of elevated blood lead levels (EBLL) cases were children exposed to lead in old housing. Lead in residential paint was not outlawed in the U.S. until 1978. Today, lead paint dust and paint chips in pre-1978 housing remains the single most toxic source of lead for children. As you know, as the oldest part of the State, Appalachian Ohio has the oldest housing stock with limited resources for home improvement, and therefore more hazards in need of repair.

There is no safe level of lead in the blood. Child lead poisoning can cause lifelong, irreversible brain and nervous system damage which can lead to learning and behavioral challenges, lower IQ, lower academic achievement, increased hyperactivity, emotional problems and future delinquent behavior.

According to the most current state EBLL data from 2016 to the present, thousands of Ohio children under 6 have been poisoned by lead and continue to be exposed to lead hazards every year. Every county in the state has children who test positive for lead poisoning based on elevated blood lead levels (EBLL). In 2024 alone, 5,671 Ohio children had a confirmed EBLL. And this number is an undercount given that, due to a number of barriers, only about 50%- 60% of high-risk children



are currently being tested for lead. Furthermore, at least 200 families are on a waitlist for ODH lead hazard control services in their homes.

We commend the Governor and the Ohio General Assembly for making child lead poisoning prevention a priority and supporting critical investments in primary prevention in the last budget – that is, addressing the source of lead exposure rather than using children as lead detectors. This includes important progress like creating and investing in the Ohio Department of Health’s (ODH) Lead Safe Home Fund which allowed 15 grantees to build on existing lead poisoning prevention efforts or create new ones with lead abatement dollars. Grantees were in a number of Appalachian counties served by COAD member agencies and across Ohio including Allen, Auglaize, Clark, Cuyahoga, Erie, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, Mercer and Marion counties, and included a range of lead hazard control, lead mitigation, lead worker training, childcare center protections, provider and family education and other prevention activities. While a tremendous amount of work has been done, much more work remains to help protect our children from lead.

Restoring the As-Introduced lead funding in the Sub-HB 96 budget bill at \$8.1 million/FY is essential to ensure our state maintains the momentum in protecting our children from lead poisoning.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Megan Riddlebarger, Executive Director