

**Interested Party Testimony for HB 96**  
**Ohio Senate Health Committee**  
**By Fred Strahorn, Executive Director**  
**Ohio Healthy Homes Network**  
**May 13, 2025**

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Ohio Senate Health Committee, I am Fred Strahorn, Executive Director of the Ohio Healthy Homes Network and a member of the Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition Leadership Team. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony on House Bill 96, in particular the lead poisoning prevention elements of the budget.

The Ohio Healthy Homes Network (OHHN) is a network of grassroots and non-profit organizations that engage in work to promote healthy, safe and affordable housing throughout the state of Ohio. OHHN advocates for policy that improves the overall health and indoor environmental quality of Ohio families in areas such as lead poisoning, mold, radon, and more.

Today, I am here to testify in support of restoring the Lead Abatement line-item [ODH440530] funding in the budget to address issues of lead poisoning in the state of Ohio.

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

Lead is a naturally occurring element that can be found in water, air, soil and consumer products. Lead is hazardous to humans. 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, and behavioral changes.

Much of Ohio's housing stock was constructed before lead-based paint was prohibited. In fact, more than two-thirds of homes in Ohio were built before 1980. In Ohio's urban communities, there is an even greater concentration of older homes. Fifty-eight percent of homes in Ohio's urban cores were built before 1950.

While lead poisoning can affect individuals of all ages, children are at the greatest risk. Children's bodies absorb lead more efficiently than adults and they are less able than adults to detoxify their bodies of lead. As children crawl, they can collect lead dust on their hands which is then ingested when they touch their hands to their mouth. Infants and toddlers are also developmentally programmed for mouthing behavior. They learn new sensations, objects and experiences through hand-to-mouth and object-to-mouth behaviors. Children in this age group may consume lead paint that is peeling or chipping.

As we know, the majority of brain development occurs within the first 5 or 6 years of a child's life. If developmental damage occurs to the brain in that period that damage is permanent. This issue impacts efforts that the state is making in other areas such as developmental disability, education and poverty.

OHHN applauds the work of Governor DeWine and the General Assembly to address this issue in previous budgets and we are sensitive to the current budget pressures. However, there is significant cost associated with not addressing the problem over the long-term. These costs show up in the form of lost productivity, increased healthcare cost, increased criminal activity, etc. In Ohio, it is estimated that there are 3.5 million homes containing some type of lead hazard, over 427,000 of those homes are occupied with children under the age of 6, and roughly 200,000 of them are low-income families. Ohio has the second highest number of children testing positive for elevated blood lead levels in the country.

This problem exists in every county in our state. The issue of lead poisoning of children in Ohio still registers as a crisis for the Ohio Healthy Homes Network and for the Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition and we believe it is important to continue to find a way to make investments in this area because of the magnitude of the problem.

OHHN urges the restoration of funding for the Lead Abatement line-item to the Executive Budget version so that the Ohio Department of Health can continue to protect children from lead poisoning. This funding will allow the Ohio Department of Health to continue testing children for lead poisoning, lead investigation and issue lead hazard controls, assist with the cost of lead licensing and exams to increase the workforce, engage in intervention services for families, to fund lead safe projects in local communities, engage in lead hazard control services to remove lead from homes.

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking member Liston and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Health Committee and I would be happy to answer any questions.