



**Ohio Senate Finance Committee
FY2022-2023 State Budget – House Bill 110
Interested Party Testimony
Gabriella Celeste, Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition
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Thank you Chair Dolan, Vice-Chair Gavaronne, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 110. My name is Gabriella Celeste and I am the Policy Director at the Schubert Center for Child Studies, Case Western Reserve University, and a member of the Leadership Team for the Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition (OLFKC), along with Timothy Johnson of the Ohio Poverty Law Center and Fred Strahorn of the Ohio Healthy Homes Network. The OLFKC is also a member of the Ohio Children’s Budget Coalition and support the whole child approach. This testimony is offered as an Interested Party to HB 110 to express support for the lead poisoning prevention items in the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) introduced budgets.

The Problem: Thousands of Ohio Children are At Risk of Lead Poisoning with Lifelong Consequences

Lead is a toxin – there is no safe level of lead in the blood. Child lead poisoning can cause irreversible brain and nervous system damage leading to [significant learning and behavioral challenges](#), and lifelong negative impacts including lower academic achievement and increased emotional problems. Findings from a [2020 study](#) on the downstream effects of lead by colleagues at Case Western Reserve University found children with lead poisoning were 25-30% more likely to enter the juvenile justice system, 34% more likely to be incarcerated as adults, and by age 23, 40% more likely to require homeless services and 53% more likely to rely on public assistance programs.

Thousands of Ohio children under 6 have been poisoned by lead and continue to be exposed to lead. The number one source of child lead poisoning -- 95% of the lead cases -- is lead dust from old homes built before lead paint was outlawed in 1978. In Ohio, more than 425,235 children under 6 years old live in these older homes and many of them are in neighborhoods both urban and rural that bear the brunt of historic disinvestment. The [Ohio Department of Health reports](#) 3,856 children tested with a confirmed elevated blood lead level (EBLL) of 5 or more micrograms per deciliter in 2018. Due to low testing rates and the substantial risk of lead exposure to young children, this number is likely a significant undercount.

The COVID pandemic has made the challenge of lead poisoning even more urgent, with more children spending extended time at home, indoors, reduced lead testing, and delays in lead investigation and remediation activities, leaving children at risk of ongoing lead exposure and lifelong harm.

Preventing Lead Poisoning Protects Children and Creates Jobs & Cost-Savings

To achieve a [lead-free future for our children](#), Ohio needs to invest in primary prevention solutions, beginning with healthy housing and safe water. The Governors Lead Advisory Committee agrees, as it noted in its [January 2020 Final Report](#), “Ohio must adopt a primary prevention approach to all sources of lead exposure and contamination.” The report makes a number of recommendations to invest in lead hazard control and strengthen the lead worker workforce to ensure lead safe work practices and other efforts to effectively implement a primary prevention strategy. Several of those recommendations are reflected in HB 110. Investments in lead poisoning prevention save lives, support jobs, and ultimately save taxpayer dollars. “For every dollar spent controlling lead hazards, [at least \\$17 would be returned](#) (and as much as \$221) in health benefits, increased IQ, higher lifetime earnings, tax revenues, lower special education costs and reduced criminal activity.”

Ohio is on the Right Track in Supporting Lead Workers & Protecting Children from Lead



Over the last biennium, the ODH and ODM have successfully implemented several programs, and partnered with other agencies, that support reducing children's exposure to lead. ODH partnerships include:

- providing lead worker training and covering the cost of certification and licenses to recruit and build the workforce – since 7/1/19, ODH added 195 new lead licensed professionals to a total of 1,267;
- managing the GRF funding to foster innovation in local lead prevention efforts, including the Cleveland Lead Safe Home Fund Pilot and Toledo's Historic South project;
- implementing the middle-income lead program and Ohio Lead tax credit to assist families who aren't eligible for other programs in removing lead hazards – all funds were quickly expended; and,
- creating a lead demolition protocol for lead-safe demolitions to reduce the release of lead dust into neighborhoods during demolition.

We urge continued support of ODH's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program and these important efforts.

HB 110 Keeps Us Moving in the Right Direction...But More is Needed to Keep Our Kids Safe

The ODH-ODM **State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) Lead Hazard Control Program** is a vital collaboration which targets removal of lead hazards from pre-1978 homes with eligible children under 6 years of age living in them. In 2 years, this SCHIP Lead Program abated lead hazards in over 200 homes in [61 counties across Ohio](#). Since the program began, **588 children** have been directly impacted by having their homes cleared of lead hazards. While this program has been highly successful, the demand far outweighs the availability of resources. ODH had to temporarily stop taking applications for this program last year, despite over 200 approved properties on the wait list for this program and about 1,200 properties with [lead hazard control orders](#) (LHCO) where children with ELLs live and lead hazards still remain.

Ohio is constantly playing catch-up when children are lead poisoned; acting only when child is found to have elevated levels of lead in their blood rather than being proactive. The SCHIP Lead Program requires more resources but also must prioritize a percentage of the funding for abating lead hazards in pre-1978 homes where children live but have not yet tested for lead poisoning. **HB 110 includes continued funding for the SCHIP Lead Program, but we urge increasing that funding from the current \$10 million to \$20 million over the biennium, as well as requiring that 50% of the funding support primary prevention to remove lead before a child is poisoned** (to ensure the program remediates lead in homes before children are poisoned and LCHOs are issued).

In addition to expanding the SCHIP Lead Program, we support where HB 110 preserves and builds on many of these investments through the Lead Abatement Fund and the Lead Safe Home Fund. HB 110 fosters local innovation and deepens state-local lead hazard control partnerships to prevent childhood lead poisoning. HB 110 also ensures lead safe work practices during renovation, repair, and painting (RRP) to prevent child lead exposure during home rehab and repair projects, a critical primary prevention strategy; however, we urge the restoration of the original language in the Executive Budget to ensure Ohio has adequate authority to administer the RRP program.

The lead initiatives in HB 110 represent a significant step forward towards preventing lead poisoning and assisting lead poisoned children with developmental services. Ohio's future prosperity depends on the health and success of our children today. Not only will the cost savings to the education, child welfare, health, public assistance and court systems benefit Ohio taxpayers, but HB 110 investments in workforce development to implement lead hazard protections, lead safe work practices and controls and in ensuring healthy homes for Ohioans will further strengthen our economy. Our children must no longer be the canaries in the "lead" coal mine, burdened with the lifelong harmful consequences of lead poisoning. HB 110 continues to build a foundation from which to grow in order to eliminate lead poisoning in our children.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership. The Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition is eager to work in partnership with Governor DeWine and the Legislature to ensure lead safety for all Ohio children.