

Testimony on H.B. 388
House Public Health Policy
By Fred Strahorn
Executive Director, Ohio Healthy Homes Network

Thank you, Chairman Matthews, Vice-Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston and committee members for giving me an opportunity to testify before you today on H.B. 388, on the Renovation, Repair and Painting rule bill. I am here on behalf of the Ohio Healthy Homes Network (OHHN) which is a non-profit organization engaged in advocacy to promote healthy, safe and affordable housing. Our organization's work is centered around indoor air quality with a particular focus on lead poisoning prevention and safety. OHHN is part of a network of non-profit organizations that work throughout the state on housing issues.

Today, I am offering proponent testimony on OHHN's position regarding H.B. 388 which would transfer authority of administering the Renovation, Repair and Painting rule from the U.S. EPA to the Ohio Department of Health.

Lead is a naturally occurring element that can be found in water, air, soil, and consumer products. 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, behavior changes, and in extreme cases even death.

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.

In Ohio, much of our housing stock was constructed before lead-based paint was prohibited. In fact, more than two-thirds of homes in Ohio were built before 1980, and more than 25% were constructed before 1950. If you were to take Cuyahoga County and the City of Cleveland, as much as 80% of the housing stock was constructed before 1950 (Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, "Lead Poisoning and the Children of Cuyahoga County").

In Ohio today, it is estimated that roughly 3.5 million houses exist with some type of lead contamination, about 425,000 of those homes are occupied by children under the age of 6 and about 200,000 of them in low-income families. The health risks that lead poses to families, in general, are serious but in the instance of children it is particularly grave.

While lead poisoning can affect individuals of all ages, children are at greatest risk. Children's bodies absorb lead more efficiently than adults, and they are less able to detoxify their bodies of lead. Infants and toddlers are developmentally programmed for mouthing behavior. Small children learn new sensations, objects, and experiences through hand-to-mouth and object-to-

mouth behaviors. This is normal up to 2 years of age. Children may consume lead paint that is peeling or chipping or through other products containing lead, such as toys. Additionally, as children crawl, they can collect lead dust on their hands, which is then ingested when they touch their hands to their mouth.

As many of you know, most human brain development occurs in the first 6 years or so of a person's life. If damage to the brain occurs from lead poisoning during this early developmental period it can do significant damage and often is irreversible. And I believe the testimony from the Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition outlines some statistical outcomes for children who have suffered from lead poisoning.

The Renovation, Repair, Painting rule was designed to protect children from lead hazards that can be created when lead-based paint is disturbed during renovation activities like sanding, carpentry and window-replacement in pre-1978 structures. The RRP rule requires contractors to engage in lead-safe practices and to be trained and certified in these low-cost, simple and effective lead-safe work practices.

H.B. 388 would transfer authority for administering the RRP rule from the U.S. EPA to the Ohio Department of Health. The Ohio Department of Health has a strong track record of working with workers to provide training and guidance on lead safe practices and is well positioned to manage the RRP program through its lead licensure program. The management of RRP by the Ohio Department of Health instead of the federal government will result in better communication, greater education, access to more resources and enhanced customer service. This will result in greater outcomes for contractors, renovators and the public in general. Workers will be able to have closer contact with staff and receive timely answers that are more sensitive to local and state needs. These changes will reduce confusion and support effective lead safe practices across the state.

In conclusion, H.B. 388 will support business-friendly strategies for contractors, provide information on certification, oversee RRP training programs, and educate the public on lead safe work practices. For these reasons, the Ohio Healthy Homes Network is a strong proponent of H.B. 388.

This concludes my testimony. And once again, I want to thank Chairman Matthews, Vice-Chair Stewart and Ranking Member Liston and committee members. Please contact me at fredstrahorn@sbcglobal.net to answer any questions.