



**Substitute House Bill 96 Testimony to the Ohio
Senate Health Committee
Gabriella Celeste, Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition
May 14, 2025 – Written Submission**

Academy of Medicine of Cleveland and Northern Ohio
Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc.
Advocates for Ohio's Future
Alliance for the Great Lakes
American Academy of Pediatrics, Ohio Chapter
Ashland/Richland County Lead Prevention Collaborative
Black Child Development Institute – Ohio
Bright Beginnings
Canton City Public Health
Center for Community Solutions
Children's Defense Fund - Ohio
Cleveland Clinic Foundation
Cleveland Dream Builders LLC
Cleveland Department of Public Health
Cleveland Lead Safe Network
Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio
Collective Citizens Organized Against Lead
Columbus Public Health
Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development
Cuyahoga County Board of Health
Enterprise Community Partners
Environmental Health Watch
Fair Housing Center
Family Connections
First Year Cleveland
Franklin County Public Health
Freshwater Future
Greater Cincinnati Water Works
Groundwork Ohio
The Khnemu Foundation
Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio
Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition
The MetroHealth System
National Council of Negro Women, Inc. – Cuyahoga County Section
Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition
Northern Ohioans for Budget & Legislation Equality
Ohio's Children's Alliance
Ohio Environmental Council
Ohio Federation for Health Equity & Justice
Ohio Head Start Association, Inc.
Ohio Healthy Homes Network (OHHN)
Ohio Nurses Association
Ohio Poverty Law Center
Ohio Public Health Association
People Working Cooperatively
Policy Matters Ohio
PRE4CLE
Public Children Services Association of Ohio
Schubert Center for Child Studies, Case Western Reserve University
Toledo Lead Poisoning Prevention Coalition
United Way of Greater Cleveland
University Hospitals Rainbow Babies & Children's
Voices for Ohio's Children
West Ohio Community Action Partnership

Thank you Chair Huffman, Vice-Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and Senate Health Committee members.

My name is Gabriella Celeste and I offer this testimony as the co-founder and leadership team member for the Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition ("OLFKC"), Policy Director of the Schubert Center for Child Studies at Case Western Reserve University, and an Interested Party on Sub-Bill 96 concerning issues related to child lead poisoning prevention and child wellness. The OLFKC represents a collection of organizations and individuals who share a deep and urgent concern about the potentially life-long harm caused by lead poisoning. The OLFKC strives to secure a public commitment and investment in primary prevention to ensure all Ohio children are safe from lead in their homes and communities.

While we supported the As-Introduced version of HB 96, we 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, effectively gutting the critical programs to protecting 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. This restoration is urgently needed, especially after the spend down of the ARPA funding, which has already resulted in significant reductions in funding for lead hazard control and workforce development. Maintaining the current state GRF funding is essential to ensuring some continued progress in protecting children from lead.** Please consider the following.

Ohio's Children & Taxpayers Bear the Costs of Lead Poisoning

Ohio ranks **2nd in the U.S.**ⁱ in the number of children with elevated blood lead levels – twice the national average!ⁱⁱ While we have made some progress, we have a long way to go.

There is **no safe level of lead in the blood** since lead is a toxin. 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.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Altarum Institute, a health care research organization, [released an online cost tool in 2019](#) that found Ohio would save an estimated **\$2.8 billion each year** by preventing child lead poisoning with investments in lead abatement and other measures.

Children are Exposed to Lead in Every Part of the State

Every county in the state has children who test positive for lead poisoning based on an elevated blood lead levels (EBLL). For example, according to the most current [state EBLL data from 2016 to the present](#), among children who were tested for lead in the following counties represented by members on this Committee, consider the total numbers of children throughout Ohio who have elevated lead in their bodies:

- Miami county has a total of 485 children
- Scioto county has a total of 280 children
- Franklin county has a total of 3,497 children
- Hamilton county has a total of 4,130 children
- Summit county has a total of 2,085 children
- Portage county has a total of 223 children
- Allen county has a total of 330 children
- Medina county has a total of 140 children
- Ashland county has a total of 233 children
- Richland county has a total of 734 children

In reality, thousands of Ohio children under 6 have been poisoned by lead and continue to be exposed to lead hazards every year. 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 even tested for lead.

Ohio's Old Housing is the Most Common Course of Child Lead Poisoning

95% of 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.

- Nearly 2/3 of Ohio's housing stock was built before 1980, meaning 3.5 million homes are estimated to contain potential lead hazards, with children under 6 years old living in over 427,000 of these units.^{iv}
- Many rural areas have older housing with potential lead hazards. In fact, Henry, Darke, and Van Wert are the top 3 counties in terms of the percentage of children under 6 living in housing built before 1980.

Despite Impressive Progress, the Urgent Problem of Child Lead Poisoning Persists in Ohio

We commend the Governor and the Ohio General Assembly for making child lead 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 counties across Ohio including Allen, Auglaize, Clark, Cuyahoga, Erie, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, Mercer and Marion counties, as well as a number of Appalachian counties served by COAD (Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development) 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, more work remains to help protect our children from lead. For instance, currently, more than 200 families are on a wait list for ODH lead hazard control services in their homes.

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 to protecting our children from lead. Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me at mgc36@case.edu with any questions.

All Ohio children deserve to be lead-free. For more information, go to <http://ohleadfreekids.org/>.

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- ⁱ Zuckerman, J. Ohio kids' show elevated blood levels at more than twice the national rate, study finds. Ohio Capital Journal (9/28/21) Date accessed 5/1/23: https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2021/09/28/ohio-kids-show-elevated-lead-blood-levels-at-more-than-twice-the-national-rate-study-finds/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=eb71d695-fc23-4ab9-b936-49201fe0d321&link_id=11&can_id=bef90bcb899b52a5c0f2abb24de237bb&source=email-daily-news-clips-77&email_referrer=email_1305206&email_subject=daily-news-clips
- ⁱⁱ Hauptman, M., Niles, J., Gudin, J. et al. Individual and Community-level Factors Associated with Detectable and Elevated Blood Levels in US Children. JAMA Pediatrics (9/27/21). Date accessed 5/1/23: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2784260>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Coulton, C., Garcia-Cobia, F. et al. Downstream Consequences of Childhood Lead Poisoning: A Longitudinal Study. (6/2020). Date accessed 5/1/23: <https://case.edu/socialwork/about/news/study-downstream-effects-childhood-lead-poisoning-reveals-racial-economic-disparities-adulthood>
- ^{iv} Ohio Housing Finance Agency (2021). Housing Stock: Lead [FY 2021 Housing Needs Assessment]. Date accessed 5/1/2023: <https://ohiohome.org/research/housingstock-hna.aspx#lead>