

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 17, 2023

The Honorable Marcia L. Fudge
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Fudge:

We are writing to urge you to take further steps to address the problem of lead poisoning in federally assisted housing. Specifically, we request an update on HUD's implementation of a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program lead-risk demonstration project, as was funded by the Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-328).

There is overwhelming evidence that lead hazards present an urgent health and safety threat to children. Lead poisoning causes significant and irreversible health, neurological, behavioral, intellectual, and academic impairments. Prior to the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identified at least 535,000 children between the age of 1 and 5 with elevated blood lead levels. That number is likely an undercount today, due to the high number of homes that were built before 1978 in the United States, low blood lead level testing rates, and the amount of time children spent at home during the pandemic under stay-at-home orders and child care closures. The CDC estimates that in early months of the COVID-19 pandemic roughly 10,000 children with elevated blood lead levels may have gone undetected due to lack of screening. The CDC, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association, American Public Health Association, and others all agree that no amount of lead in the blood stream is safe. Any amount of lead exposure will have adverse effects on infant and child neurodevelopment. It is critical to the health and well-being of our children that lead hazards are identified and eliminated before a child is exposed.

This is especially true in federally assisted housing. We cannot tolerate the lead poisoning of low-income children whose caregivers turned to federally assisted housing programs for safe and decent housing. Immediately before the pandemic, HUD identified at least 57,000 federally assisted housing units with lead hazards and 450,000 federally assisted housing units occupied by at least one child and built before 1978. In addition, there is evidence that HCV program households are concentrated in areas with the highest risk of lead poisoning. In fact, the National Housing Law Project estimated that 90,000 children in the housing choice voucher program have lead poisoning, and an additional 340,000 children living in federally assisted housing are at risk.

Under current HUD regulations—which require that children in the HCV program develop lead poisoning before a risk assessment is conducted—too many children, largely low-income and minority, are exposed to lead and suffer permanent brain damage. This

demonstration project will provide important information on the benefits of and structure for requiring pre-occupancy risk assessments in HCV program units and support participating landlords in covering the costs of remediation and abatement. This demonstration project can lay the infrastructure for adopting risk assessments across federally assisted housing, including the HCV program, *before* a child is exposed and suffers permanent neurological harm.

The cost-benefit ratio of primary prevention and lead hazard remediation and abatement is undeniable—research shows that the annual economic burden associated with childhood lead exposure amounts to \$50.9 billion in the United States.^{[1][1]} Furthermore, research has found that every dollar invested in lead paint hazard controls results in a return of \$17 to \$221, or a net savings of \$181 to \$269 billion.^{[2][2]}

We have previously alerted HUD of our great concern and the urgency of addressing childhood lead poisoning in both federally assisted and private market housing, especially because the health and safety of so many vulnerable children are at stake. We urge you to develop a robust and comprehensive demonstration project and request that you provide us with regular updates as you begin planning, including who you have consulted in the planning process and justification for any decisions on location and study design, among other factors.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to working with you to work to obtain healthy housing for children across the country, and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



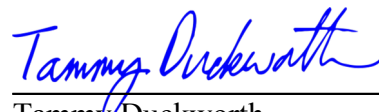
Robert Menendez
United States Senator

^{[1][1]} Teresa M. Attina and Leonardo Trasande, Economic Costs of Childhood Lead Exposure in Low- and Middle-Income Countries, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/1206424/>).

^{[2][2]} Elise Gould, Childhood Lead Poisoning: Conservative Estimates of the Social and Economic Benefits of Lead Hazard Control, 117 ENVTL. HEALTH PERSP. 1162, 1164 (2009).



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



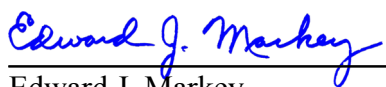
Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



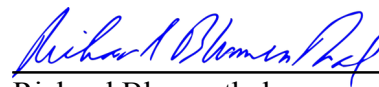
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