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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025

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February 25, 2016

The Honorable Julián Castro
Secretary
Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20410

Dear Secretary Castro:

As Chairman and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, we write regarding the urgent need to address the threat of lead poisoning in our nation's public and assisted housing. We have long worked to support critical programs that reduce lead hazards in homes, and we urge you to update the blood lead level required to compel environmental intervention in households with children.

In 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lowered its blood lead threshold for children from 10 to 5 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood. This revised, stronger standard was developed after extensive research showed that even lower blood lead levels can significantly impact a child's brain development. In fact, there is no safe level of lead. As a result, the CDC now estimates that 535,000 American children under six years of age are affected by lead poisoning.

Seventy percent of lead poisonings are a result of dust exposure from lead paint in the home. As you know, children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of lead poisoning. Once a child has been poisoned, the resulting harm to their developing brains can be severe and lasting, and is often manifested in reduced IQ, behavioral problems, and learning disabilities. This completely preventable condition traps generations in poverty and robs children of their opportunity to succeed.

HUD has failed to adjust the blood lead threshold that it uses for purposes of environmental intervention in households with children. In fact, HUD regulations have not been updated since 1999, allowing for children's blood lead levels to be three to four times higher than the CDC standard before action is required to address lead hazards in public and assisted housing. This standard is unacceptably high and results in children living in conditions that have been scientifically proven to result in lifelong neurological damage. It forces low-income parents to make an impossible choice between keeping a roof over their children's heads and keeping them out of harm's way. We urge you to expedite regulatory action on HUD's standard for environmental intervention and adopt the blood lead levels currently advised by the CDC.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter. We have come a long way since lead paint was initially banned in houses decades ago, but there are still millions of households nationwide with potential lead hazards. As we continue to work on efforts to prevent lead poisoning, we must ensure that HUD's regulations protect those living in public and assisted housing.

Sincerely,



Susan Collins, Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510



Jack Reed, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
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