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Delegate Maggie McIntosh, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
6 Bladen Street, Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **FAVORABLE** - HB1425 - Infrastructure Grants - Federal Infrastructure Investment and Coordination Unit - Established

Dear Chairman McIntosh and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative, I offer this testimony in support of HB1425. The Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI) is the nation's largest healthy homes organization, dedicated to addressing the social determinants of health and advancing racial and health equity through the creation of healthy, safe, and energy efficient homes. By delivering a standard of excellence, GHHI aims to eradicate the negative health impacts of unhealthy housing and unjust policies for children, seniors, and families to ensure better health, economic, and social outcomes with an emphasis on black and brown and low-income communities. The Green & Healthy Homes Initiative has been at the frontline of holistic healthy housing for over thirty years in Maryland.

Low income communities of color are disproportionately impacted by unhealthy environments and unsafe housing which directly cause health disparities in lead poisoning, asthma and household injury as well as generating inequities in school attendance and educational performance, economic opportunity, lifetime earnings and other social outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened health disparities in low income communities due to the existence of hazardous housing conditions. Federal Infrastructure funding provides an opportunity for the state to commit substantial funding for lead hazard remediation and healthy housing interventions. Improving housing safety and stability is critical to achieve the state's goals related to health, environmental, and socioeconomic and racial equity.

For decades, lead poisoning has been a leading contributor to learning disabilities, speech development problems, loss of IQ, attention deficit disorder and aggressive behavior, which results in poor school performance and increased school drop-out rates. Millions of dollars are spent on special education and juvenile justice costs in Maryland to combat the effects of lead poisoning, and thousands of children enter our public school systems with impediments to their development, unable to achieve academically at the rate of their classmates.

Lead is a toxic substance that can accumulate in the body over time and our youngest children are most at risk. Drinking water alone can compose 20% or more of a person's cumulative exposure. The CDC states that young children are the most at risk of absorbing lead from their environments and research shows that lead in paint, soil, water and dust is a significant source of exposure for this age group. In 2019, there were 1,526 children with elevated blood levels (EBLs) of 5 µg/dl or higher in Maryland. We must ensure that lead's harmful impacts on the developing brains and bodies of children is not occurring in the homes and communities where our children reside and play.

Proposed Revisions to HB1425

GHHI proposes the following two revisions for consideration by the Committee to HB1425 to strengthen the Bill and insure that lead hazard abatement is a priority for Infrastructure Fund expenditures in Maryland. Requested revisions to HB1425:

1. Establish lead-based paint hazard remediation and lead service line replacement as a priority for the utilization of Federal Infrastructure Funds in Section 2-211(D)(5).
2. Require that properties receiving Infrastructure Funds for lead hazard remediation services achieve a lead free or limited lead free standard following intervention.

Federal Infrastructure Funds provide a rare opportunity for Maryland to implement the primary prevention interventions that we know work in protecting young children – removing lead hazards from older homes. We must also seize this unique opportunity to conduct more intensive lead hazard remediation with these funds by requiring that windows, doors, baseboards, exterior trim and other leaded components be replaced to permanently abate the lead-based paint hazard rather than the more temporary lead paint stabilization techniques that can deteriorate over time and become hazardous.

Low income communities have been disproportionately impacted by unhealthy housing and toxins in their neighborhoods. By setting priorities and having full accountability for the use of Infrastructure Funds, these investments can produce improved health and social outcomes that also reap benefits in terms of lower long term health care, special education, social service and criminal justice costs. The passage of HB1425 will help protect children and residents' health and provide our citizens with the opportunity to live in safer homes and environments where they can thrive. We ask for a Favorable report on HB1425.

Respectfully submitted,



Ruth Ann Norton
President and CEO