



HB1110 – Environment - Lead Poisoning Prevention – Elevated Blood Lead Level
Hearing before the House Environment and Transportation Committee,
March 2, 2022
Position: SUPPORT (FAV)

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility supports HB1110 which would update Maryland’s Reduction of Lead Risk in Housing Law to meet current public health standards on lead poisoning set by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). In October 2021, that reference value was reduced to 3.5 µg/dl¹ and HB1110 continue to keep Maryland action levels in line with CDC recommendations. This means that children with a 3.5 µg/dl will benefit at that level from state-mandated environmental investigation and corrective actions.

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility (CPSR) is statewide evidenced-based, organization of over 900 physicians, other health professionals and supporters, that addresses the existential public health threats: nuclear weapons, the climate crisis and the issues of pollution and toxics’ effect on health as seen through the intersectional lens of environmental, social and racial justice. As an organization founded by physicians, we understand that prevention is far superior to treatment in reducing costs; death, illness, injury, and suffering

Children ingest more, absorb more, and the developing brain is more sensitive to the effects of lead exposure than the adult brain. No known threshold for the effects of lead including on IQ has been identified and there are no known safe levels for exposure to lead.

While very high levels of lead exposure can cause vomiting, lethargy, seizures and death, even low levels can cause significant and lifelong injury. Prenatal exposure to maternal blood levels below 5 mg/dl are associated with low birth weight in infants. Levels below 5 micrograms per deciliter in children, have been associated with reduction in academic ability and IQ, with attention deficit, and anti-social behaviors.² There will be economic costs as well as quality of life costs for these children. Each IQ point raises worker’s productivity and the lifetime economic losses in the United States attributable to lead exposure have been estimated to be between \$165-233 billion in the cohort of children < or equal to 6 years of age in 2006 who had blood levels 2 micrograms per deciliter or higher.³ This cohort has an estimated total loss of 13

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/data/blood-lead-reference-value.htm>

² <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/138/1/e20161493/52600/Prevention-of-Childhood-Lead-Toxicity>.

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2717145/>

million IQ points from lead poisoning. Since there is no blood lead level that is considered safe, when estimates include any measurable blood levels, the total IQ loss for that group of children <6 with any measurable lead, goes up to 23 million collective IQ points.⁴

Primary prevention, which is removing the sources of lead before exposure occurs, is the most reliable and cost-effective way to protect our children according to a policy statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The authors reminded pediatricians that education on hand washing and dust control has no effect on reducing lead levels. **The Academy goes on to urge pediatricians and parents to promulgate regulations to test children and housing both before and after abatement, and call for “local or state governments, in consultation with pediatricians, develop policies and regulations requiring the remediation of lead-contaminated housing and child care facilities, including the elimination of lead hazards during transfer of rental units or renovation or demolition of older housing.”**⁵

HB1110 will protect all of Maryland’s children including those of renting families. In 2013, The Abell Foundation report “Justice Diverted” based on a survey of people brought before renter’s court, found that 41% noted flaking or peeling paint.⁶ This suggests that these largely low-income renters, heavily represented by women of color with children, are especially vulnerable to lead poisoning in their children. Earlier intervention actions at the 3.5 µg/dl level would hasten notice to property owners of possible lead exposure in the rental unit. Early interventions represent prevention of further harm. HB1110 will protect Maryland’s children including the most vulnerable, those renting in old housing, some of which is substandard with peeling paint and other risk factors for lead exposure in children. HB1110 will be an important way to reach more children with significant lead exposures and intervene before more serious harm is done.

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility is a member organization of Renters United and strongly supports HB1110

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⁴ <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/10.1289/ehp.1104170#t1>

⁵ <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/138/1/e20161493/52600/Prevention-of-Childhood-Lead-Toxicity>

⁶ <https://abell.org/sites/default/files/files/cd-justicediverted216.pdf>