



2714 Hudson Street
Baltimore, MD 21224-4716
P: (410) 534-6447
F: (410) 534-6475
www.ghhi.org

March 11, 2026

Delegate Kriselda Valderrama
House Economic Matters Committee
230 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: **FAVORABLE – HB1549** - Reduction of Lead Risk in Housing – Rental Dwelling Unit - Definition

Dear Chair Valderrama and Members of the Committee:

The Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI) writes in support of House Bill 1549. This Bill would remedy a significant flaw in Maryland law by expanding the Maryland Reduction of Lead in Housing Law to include single-room tenancies and other tenancies where children and pregnant women may be exposed to lead hazards in rental properties, but which are currently not protected by under the Maryland Reduction of Lead Risk in Housing Law. Tenants who pay rent for a single room or a part of house and have a landlord-tenant relationship by all other standards, are placed at risk in pre-1978 constructed rental homes that are not required to meet Maryland's lead risk reduction certification standards based upon a technicality in the law which undermines the state's lead poisoning prevention efforts.

GHHI has advocated for tenants' rights in Maryland and throughout the country for over three decades. GHHI supported the enactment of the groundbreaking Maryland Reduction of Lead Risk in Housing Law in 1994 and has worked to help reduce childhood lead poisoning in our state since then by 99%. GHHI provides tenants' rights assistance, rental property owner compliance assistance, and legal representation of tenants statewide in Maryland for the repair of lead hazards and other hazardous conditions in tenant-occupied homes. In addition to being the President and CEO of GHHI, I also serve as the Chair of the Maryland Lead Poisoning Prevention Commission and serve or have served as a member of the EPA Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee, the CDC Lead Exposure and Prevention Advisory Committee, and the Maryland Green and Healthy Homes Task Force among others.

Maryland Environment Article § 6-801(u) defines what constitutes an affected "rental dwelling unit" under the Maryland Reduction of Lead in Housing Law, and what is protected by the law's hazard remediation and lead inspection certification standards prior to a tenant occupying an older rental property. Under the current § 6-801(u), "rental dwelling unit" is defined as "a room or group of rooms that form a single independent habitable rental unit for permanent occupation by one or more individuals that has living facilities with permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation."

House Bill 1549 Written Testimony
March 11, 2026
Page Two

There is a flaw in the current language of § 6-801(u) as it **excludes** tenants who rent single rooms or parts of a home that themselves do not independently from the rest of the home or building include “permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation.” This causes those types of pre-1978 rental properties to be excluded from coverage under the law even if those tenants are otherwise given access to those provisions as part of their tenancy.

This means that pregnant women, parents with young children and others who live in single-room or portions of a pre-1978 rental home are not being protected against lead hazards. Not only does this harm tenants who are most impacted by the affordability crisis, but this also contradicts the stated purpose of the Subtitle in Md. Environment Article § 6-802. According to § 6-802, “[t]he purpose of this subtitle is to reduce the incidence of childhood lead poisoning, while maintaining the stock of available affordable rental housing.” This legislation is necessary so that tenants who rent single-room rental units are afforded the same protection as other tenants in Maryland who rent larger rental units by requiring these properties to meet lead risk reduction standards and inspection certification.

Not addressing this shortcoming in the Maryland law leaves children and tenants at risk from unsafe and uncertified older rental properties where lead hazards may exist, but where there is no state-required lead remediation compliance requirements, oversight or enforcement. Young children are at greatest risk from lead exposure and the CDC has determined that there is no safe level of lead in the blood of a child at which harm does not occur. Lead poisoning directly causes learning disabilities, loss of IQ, speech development problems, attention deficit disorder and violent aggressive behavior. Children poisoned by lead are seven times more likely to drop out of school and six times more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system, and can suffer upwards of \$2 million in lost lifetime earnings.

If there are concerns from rental property owners about whether this legislation would possibly include other kinds of rental properties not used for landlord/tenant relationships, this legislation is drafted to address those concerns by still requiring that, in order to qualify as an affected property under the law, that a tenant be provided access to “permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation” as part of their tenancy even if those provisions are not included in the room they are renting. For regulatory purposes, MDE can require that landlords must only ensure that the spaces that tenants are given access to as part of their tenancy must be addressed for lead hazard remediation under the Maryland Reduction of Lead Risk in Housing Law. Landlords are already accustomed to this kind of practice, since they do not have to address potential lead hazards on their property in areas which are “secured and inaccessible to occupants[.]” Md. Environment Article § 6-801(u)(2)(iii).

House Bill 1549 Written Testimony
March 11, 2026
Page Three

Fiscal & Policy Note

Finally, in addition to the considerations above for improving protections for children and tenants living in unprotected lead-affected rental units, this Bill would also increase important funding for MDE program staff through registration fees generated for the Lead Poisoning Prevention Program Fund. According to the current Fiscal and Policy Note, if HB1549 were enacted into law, special fund revenues would increase by an estimated \$1.4 million in Fiscal Year 2027 from additional affected rental property registration fees, for a net increase of over \$1 million in state revenue after accounting for increases in expenditures resulting from passing this Bill. These funds would help to further expand MDE's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program and its staffing capacity to implement the law statewide.

For these reasons, we request a Favorable Report on HB1549.

Sincerely,

Signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ruth Ann Norton". The signature is written in a cursive style and is enclosed within a blue rounded rectangular border.

6171FEFD32CD49A...

Ruth Ann Norton
President and CEO