Lead Paint in Older Homes Poses a Serious Threat to Children’s Health

Lead is a potent Neurotoxin and exposure has been linked to a variety of health problems, including intellectual and behavioral disabilities, lowered IQ, stunted growth, hearing loss, and anemia. Children are especially at risk and can be exposed to lead in a variety of ways, including through exposure to household paint. Lead was used in paint until 1978 and thousands of homes in Massachusetts still contain lead paint. This is a statewide problem with extensive lead concentration in homes in 18 cities and towns and seven high-risk communities. According to the World Health Organization, the weathering, peeling or chipping of lead-based paints plays a role in children’s exposure, especially as some young children eat the fragments or lick dust-laden fingers. There is no effective treatment for lead poisoning and therefore prevention is necessary. Demand for lead abatement funding in Massachusetts has been expanded as a result of the Baker Administration’s recognition – through the Department of Public Health – of the high-level of danger associated with lead exposure and subsequent lowering of the threshold at which children are deemed lead poisoned.

What is the Get the Lead Out (GTLO) program?
The Get the Lead Out Program is a partnership between the Department of Public Health (DPH), the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), and MassHousing. The GTLO Program, administered through local rehabilitation agencies, offers no-interest loans to income-eligible homeowners to remove hazardous lead paint from their homes, with repayment deferred until the home is sold or refinanced. In 2016, DHCD & Mass Housing increased the income limits of homeowners who could qualify for these loans, modified some of the loan terms and addressed technical concerns of lenders resulting in a significant increase in demand for this program. The increase in demand for lead abatement loans is evidenced by of the 100 loans distributed through the GTLO Program in FY2018, representing the largest number of loans distributed in a single Fiscal year in the last decade. Since its inception in 1997, the GTLO program sources have been approximately $99 million, and all but $2.1 million has been spent. MACDC views the ongoing need for lead-paint abatement as a compelling environmental justice and public health challenge and a further impediment to access to fair housing across the state.

What Should be done?
MACDC urges the legislature to provide $5 million to recapitalize the Get the Lead Out Program. This should be sufficient to extend the program for an additional three years and will help to ensure a healthier future for the Commonwealth’s children.

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