

Fund the Massachusetts Healthy Homes Initiative

\$100 Million of Federal Funds from the American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA)

The Massachusetts Housing Stock is Among the Oldest in the Nation, with Many Homes in Need of Improvement

More than 70% of homes in Massachusetts were constructed before lead paint was banned in 1978. These homes are likely to contain some lead-based paint which can be inhaled or ingested, unless steps have already been taken to make them lead-safe or to remove that lead paint. Substandard homes also can have other hazards, including poor indoor air quality, which is caused by mold, dust, second-hand smoke; poor ventilation; infestation; structural inadequacies; and leaky pipes. Inadequate and unsafe housing is a particular concern in communities of color, rural towns, Gateway Cities, and other places deeply impacted by COVID-19.

Housing Quality Impacts Resident Health

The presence of lead, poor indoor air quality, and other substandard housing conditions pose serious, and in some cases irreversible, health hazards. Any amount of lead in the body can hurt children's brain, kidneys, and nervous system, slow down their growth and development, make it hard for them to learn, damage their hearing and speech, and cause behavior problems. Poor indoor air quality can cause respiratory and allergy symptoms and difficulty breathing and can cause asthma or make asthma symptoms worse. Properties that are unsafe can cause accidents and falls and accelerate the spread of infectious diseases, like COVID-19.

Housing Quality is a Racial Equity Issue

According to the MA Department of Public Health, Black children are nearly 2.5 times more likely to have lead poisoning than white children. Additionally, children living in low-income communities are over 3 times more likely to have elevated lead levels than children living in high income communities. Asthma – which can be caused by poor indoor air quality – is also unevenly distributed across the Commonwealth. According to a 2017 report, Emergency Department visits for asthma were 2.5 and 3.5 times higher for Hispanic and Black non-Hispanic children as compared with white children. This same report showed that 17% of children living in a household with income of less than \$25,000 suffered from asthma as compared with 8% of children living in households with an income of over \$75,000.

The Massachusetts Healthy Homes Initiative Will Improve Housing Quality and Resident Health

The Massachusetts Healthy Homes Initiative (MHHI) is an opportunity to improve the quality and safety of thousands of homes across the Commonwealth and to improve the health of families currently living in these homes and the generations of families who will live there in the future. Many of these home improvements are also necessary to safely electrify the homes, as we work to achieve our urgent Climate Action Goals.

We are calling on the Massachusetts legislature to invest \$100 million in Federal ARPA funds in the MHHI to provide grants and low-cost deferred-payment loans to income-eligible homeowners and landlords so they can make the necessary repairs. The program should also assist property owners with hiring and overseeing contractors. We recommend that at least 50% of the funds be used for lead paint abatement, as, according to a 2019 Report by the MA Dept. of Public Health, only 10% of all pre-1978 housing has undergone lead inspections or deleading activity. This investment will improve about 5,000 homes, and over time improve the health of many more thousands of households.

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