

**Testimony for the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
FY15 Hearing: Driving Innovation through Federal Investments**

Submitted by:

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The Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI) has prepared this statement to illustrate the importance of federal funding to driving innovation in the United States, specifically to create healthy, safe and energy efficient housing.

GHHI is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. Our role in creating healthy, safe and energy efficient homes began in 1986 in Baltimore, Maryland with the founding of Parents Against Lead (PAL). PAL set out to "break the link between unhealthy housing and unhealthy children." In 1993 PAL became the Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning which now does business as GHHI and provides direct service programs that have served over 25,000 Baltimore families. Our work in response to the interrelated tragedies of deteriorating housing conditions and childhood lead poisoning launched one of the most successful public health and housing campaigns in the United States—resulting in a 98% decrease in the incidence of childhood lead poisoning in Maryland between 1993 and 2013 (from 14,546 to 364). GHHI has advised 36 jurisdictions around the country on lead poisoning prevention and healthy homes policies and practices.

Drawing upon its deep experience in the lead hazard control, healthy housing, and weatherization fields, the organization launched GHHI in 2008, **with the aim of transforming the country's fractured and siloed approach to the delivery of energy and health-based housing interventions.** GHHI was begun with strong support and endorsement from the Transformation Initiative at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Department of Energy (DOE), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Council on Foundations, and over thirty local and national foundations.

There are currently 16 GHHI-designated cities and we will grow to 60 sites by 2016. We employ 45 healthy homes professionals, headquartered in Baltimore and operating in four regional offices (Providence, RI; Jackson, MS; Los Angeles, CA; Washington, DC).

Need for a New Housing Approach

Generations of chronic disinvestment in low income communities have left nearly 9 million families trapped in unhealthy and energy inefficient housing. Unhealthy housing is the source of 535,000 cases of childhood lead poisoning, 750,000 asthma related emergency room visits,

10,000 carbon monoxide poisonings and 13 million preventable home related injuries every year. Among children, 70% of lead poisonings and 40% of asthma episodes are avoidable through home interventions. Childhood environmental diseases cost society over \$111 billion annually (\$56B asthma, \$43B lead poisoning, \$3B childhood cancer, \$9B for neurobehavioral disorders). Home injuries are the second leading cause of death for children under five years and lead to more than 10 million emergency room visits per year; this results in \$222 billion in medical costs annually, with falls in the home accounting for \$81 billion. Additionally, low income households typically spend 14% of their total income on energy costs versus 3.5% for other households. Asthma is the leading medical cause of school absences, resulting in 14 million absences a year and 10 million missed work days for parents.

Historic Opportunity for Innovation

The burgeoning energy efficiency sector, as well as an increased focus on prevention and community health as part of health care reform, provided GHHI new avenues and resources to address housing needs and transform communities. GHHI envisioned energy auditors, environmental health assessors, and home inspectors as the new front line for health care. Many medical conditions are impacted by patients' environments; these home health professionals could identify hazards such as mold, radon, carbon monoxide, and lead paint before these conditions sent people to the hospital. Hospitals and other health care payers are looking for ways to improve care, as well as lower costs and readmission rates. Using housing as a platform for improving health was, and is, a natural fit.

An Innovative Holistic Delivery Model

GHHI addresses the challenge of improving occupied housing with a history of energy and health-related problems. These homes drive the highest and most inefficient costs to both residents and society. GHHI has developed a comprehensive assessment tool to identify home deficiencies. Upon assessment, a single scope of work is written for the home incorporating all needed interventions and service providers. Funding may come from HUD, DOE, CDC, or EPA programs, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), foundation support, or utilities. Depending on the needs, a home may receive: health, safety, and energy conservation education for the residents; weatherization, ventilation, and insulation; energy efficient windows; gutter/downspout replacement; sealing to prevent water intrusion; integrated pest management services; plumbing repairs; air filtration unit; roofing repair; flooring replacement; lead-based paint stabilization; furnace replacement; allergen and asthma trigger reduction; and other additional home improvements. GHHI is able to address numerous hazards and deficiencies in a home by integrating multiple housing programs and funding sources.

Creating Efficiencies, Not New Programs

Families are negatively impacted by the redundancies of multiple inspections and home visits. Without coordination, well intended programs are often unable to fulfill their mission. For example, weatherization and energy efficiency programs are often deferred or declined because of issues such as lead hazards, mold or pests. Programs intended to address health and safety issues are often blocked because of the state of a poorly weatherized house. But when conducted in concert, programs can be implemented more efficiently and cost-effectively. In each city where GHHI works, we connect agencies and reduce barriers to collaboration by aligning existing programs from federal agencies, foundations, and private sector entities; braiding funding streams that support home intervention work; and coordinating the activity of organizations that provide services. This re-management and repurposing of housing agencies and funds in local governments improves operational efficiencies and streamlines processes. GHHI was cited in the White House Report “New Way of Doing Business” in 2011 as a model in the section on “Collaboration Breaks Through Bureaucratic Barriers.”

Platform for Public-Private Partnerships and Leveraging Resources

GHHI creates efficiencies and promotes smarter spending, providing a platform for joint investment that leverages philanthropic and private sector resources. Corporate entities and philanthropies have committed over \$69 million in investments towards GHHI efforts. Federal investment served as the anchor to bring in philanthropic and other private sector support. For two years running, a HUD Secretary’s Award for Public-Philanthropic Partnerships has been won by organizations for their GHHI work: the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo in 2012 and the Rhode Island Foundation in 2013. GHHI was highlighted in the 2013 Federal Healthy Homes Work Group report, “Advancing Healthy Housing: A Strategy For Action” under the goal to “Explore Ways to Leverage Funding across Federal and Non-Federal Programs.”

FY 2015 Funding Recommendations

To ensure there is a robust effort to address the home health, safety, and energy needs of the most vulnerable families across the country, GHHI recommends:

- At least \$250 million for HUD’s Office of Healthy Homes, a \$140 million increase over FY14, with \$100 million targeted for the Healthy Homes Initiative
- At least \$50 million for CDC Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, a \$35 million increase over FY14
- At least \$28 million for CDC Asthma Control Program, a \$3 million increase over FY14
- At least \$224.6 million for DOE’s Weatherization Assistance Grant Program, an increase of \$53.7 million over FY14
- At least \$3.1 billion for HUD’s Community Development Block Grant Program (level)

- At least \$750 million for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences at NIH, an increase of \$15 million over FY14

Benefits and Savings from GHHI

The model is showing dramatic impact on the health, social, and economic well-being of families, as well as improving how local governments provide services. The initial 16 sites have generated impressive positive outcomes through the production of the first 5,000 “GHHI Certified” units in their communities. GHHI has seen a 60 to 69% reduction in asthma-related hospitalizations following a GHHI home intervention, with a 25-63% reduction in emergency room visits. A study has also shown a 67% reduction in home-based asthma triggers. Families served through GHHI have seen a \$405-\$700 average annual reduction in home energy bills. The home improvements have significantly improved school attendance, with a 62% increase in asthmatic children not missing any days due to asthma, as well as work attendance, with an 88% increase in parents not missing any days of work due to their child’s asthma.

Creating a Sustainable Career Pathway

The Green & Healthy Homes Initiative has also introduced a holistic, comprehensive approach to workforce development and the building trades. Through philanthropic support and training partners in GHHI cities, GHHI has provided training and job placement for residents from low income communities, including the unemployed, under-employed, and individuals with criminal records. GHHI workers are cross-trained in building assessment and performance trades, and receive multiple training certifications that allow them to cost-effectively conduct multiple interventions in a single-stream contractor approach. With Open Society Foundation support, 1,100 persons have been cross-trained for higher paying ‘green’ jobs. A study by the Center for Employment Opportunities of workers going through GHHI training found a nearly \$3,000 increase in earnings compared to workers who were trained in just one skill and did not receive multiple certifications.

Building a Movement

GHHI has twice been endorsed by the US Conference of Mayors, which adopted a resolution calling on its 1,100 members to implement GHHI systems reforms. Over 50 cities and localities around the nation have expressed interest in becoming part of the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative. Over the next three years, GHHI will be expanding its designation and work to an additional 45 cities that meet the GHHI standard. The designation will incentivize integrative, holistic approaches to housing interventions, reward innovative leaders, and ultimately result in more green, safe, and healthy homes and communities across the country.