



October 12, 2023

The Honorable James Arciero, Chair  
Joint Committee on Housing  
State House, Room 146  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Lydia Edwards, Chair  
Joint Committee on Housing  
State House, Room 413C  
Boston, MA 02133

*Submitted via email*

**RE: Support for An act creating the Massachusetts Healthy Homes Program (H.1307/S.881)**

Dear Chairs Arciero and Edwards, and Members of the Joint Committee on Housing,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of the *Healthy Homes* legislation. Passing this bill would be an important step forward to prevent significant health problems among Massachusetts residents. Rehabilitating older homes reduces exposure to mold, lead, pests, asbestos and other hazards that pose significant, long term health risks.

There is no question that there is an affordable housing crisis today in our state. One aspect of this crisis is the plethora of older housing with deferred maintenance. The majority of Massachusetts homes were built before the 1978 ban of lead-based paint and to this day, tens of thousands of these homes have yet to be remediated. This makes these homes unavailable for families with children under age 5 since lead exposure harms brain development and damages the respiratory, nervous, and urinary systems. These health problems impact the Commonwealth's Gateway Cities the hardest, including cities like Springfield, Holyoke and Chicopee in our region. In addition to being high risk communities for childhood lead poisoning, residents suffer disproportionately from asthma-related hospitalizations. Racial inequities exist in who is most impacted: Black children are 2.5 times more likely to have lead poisoning than White children; emergency department visits for asthma are 2.5 and 3.5 times higher for Hispanic and Black non-Hispanic children as compared to White children.

I write to you on behalf of a nonprofit organization based in Springfield, MA, a Gateway City which has historically had one of the worst rates of asthma in the country. For more than two decades, we have led the [Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition](#) (PVAC) to advance collaborative efforts that address asthma, include the housing conditions that can cause or exacerbate asthma. In 2017, PVAC partnered with Revitalize CDC to work on a healthy homes model to address one of the root causes of asthma—unhealthy housing. Developed with technical assistance and funding from the [Green & Healthy Homes Initiative](#), the **Doorway to an Accessible, Healthy Home (DASHH) program** is now led by Revitalize CDC and won the 2021

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Healthcare Heroes Award for healthcare collaborations. This program has served more than 1,200 families in our region and we believe has contributed in part to the Springfield area moving from the #1 asthma capital to #46, along with other concerted community and healthcare initiatives.

Introduced by Representatives Cruz and Arriaga and Senator Keenan, H.1307/S.881 will establish the **Massachusetts Healthy Homes Program (MHHP)**. This new program is needed to better coordinate existing home repair programs and to leverage other funding sources. Once established and funded, the MHHP will be administered by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC). It will offer grants, forgivable loans, and deferred payment loans to eligible owner-occupants and landlords whose properties have habitability concerns. MHHP grants/loans may be used to address many health and safety problems including asbestos, mold, pests, and lead. Additionally, these funds may be used to prepare homes for renewable energy systems and other efforts to reduce energy and water use and utility costs.

To address health inequities, the MHHP legislation requires that at least 50% of the funds be used in Gateway Cities, where households of color are disproportionately impacted by the unhealthy conditions of old housing stock.

Several states including Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York already have similar programs and it is time for Massachusetts to follow their suit and learn from their experiences. Our housing crisis shows no signs of abating, and we must not let existing homes be unhealthy or uninhabitable.

**We respectfully ask you to support and favorably report *An act creating the Massachusetts Healthy Homes Program (H.1307/S.881)*** from this Committee. If you have questions or would like to discuss our request, please contact me (jcollins@publichealthwm.org, 413-794-7739) or our Policy Director Andrea Freeman (afreeman@publichealthwm.org, 978-895-0960)

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Collins  
Executive Director

Cc: Members, Joint Committee on Housing and the Western MA delegation