

American Rescue Plan State Fiscal Recovery Fund Recommendation Cover Sheet

Please submit this document with any recommendations for funding from Rhode Island’s allocation of federal fiscal recovery funds available through the American Rescue Plan Act. This information will be made available to the public along with any detailed documents submitted that describe the proposal. It is encouraged that such documents identify clear goals and objectives and quantifiable metrics.

This is not a formal request for funds, and submission of recommendations does not guarantee a response, public hearing, or appropriation from the General Assembly.

Name of Lead Agency: Childhood Lead Action Project

Additional agencies making recommendation (if applicable): _____

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Brief Project Description (attachments should contain details)

Expand existing lead paint hazard abatement programs & lead law enforcement

Total request: \$ 80 million

One-time or Recurring Expense? Recurring

ARPA Eligibility Category (check all that apply) – See link for further information

<https://www.rilegislature.gov/commissions/arpa/commdocs/Treasury%20-%20Quick-Reference-Guide.pdf>

- Respond to the public health emergency and its economic impacts X
- Premium pay to eligible workers _____
- Government services/state revenue replacement _____
- Water/sewer/broadband infrastructure _____



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American Rescue Plan State Fiscal Recovery Fund Recommendation: Expand Existing Lead Abatement Programs + Enforcement Efforts

Who is the Childhood Lead Action Project?

CLAP is a locally-based, nationally-recognized 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to the mission of eliminating childhood lead poisoning in RI. Since 1992, CLAP has worked to provide community input in every major lead poisoning prevention initiative in the state, spearheaded multiple campaigns to craft & implement groundbreaking lead poisoning prevention policy, & educated over 27,000 parents, immigrants, refugees, tenants, health workers, homeowners, & other professionals in high-risk communities about lead dangers & resources. No other organization in the state has the same level of expertise & track record of strategic success, extensive community networks, & current partnership infrastructure ready to be leveraged for projects like these.

Lead Poisoning Background

- Lead poisoning is a serious and preventable children's environmental health issue with lifelong consequences that affects hundreds of Rhode Island children every year. Lead exposure can harm children's brain development, leading to lifelong learning and behavioral challenges and put adults at higher risk for hypertension and heart disease.
- In 2020, **631 children** (3.2% of children screened) statewide had an elevated blood lead level above the state's intervention level (RIDOH). Many public health officials suspect this number may be even higher, due to lowered screening rates during the pandemic.
- Lead poisoning most commonly occurs via chipping, peeling, or dust from lead paint on old houses, contaminated soil, and contaminated drinking water from lead pipes (see Lead-Free Water RI proposal).
- RI's Lead Hazard Mitigation Act requires most pre-78 rental housing to have a valid lead certificate, only about 6% of RI's pre-1978 units currently do. Approx 302,501 units, 94% of RI's pre-78 housing stock, doesn't meet state lead safety standard (HousingWorks RI).

Funding Proposal

- We have an excellent opportunity to expand existing lead abatement programs to fix hazards in soil, dust & paint. By investing **\$20 million from American Rescue Plan funds per year for 3 years** in existing lead hazard reduction programs, Rhode Island could protect over 2000 families from lead hazards in paint and soil. By focusing on populations in RI's Qualified Census

Tracts, considered to be the areas disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, this investment could prioritize based on equity and environmental justice. Many of these areas are also those most affected by lead poisoning, according to RIDOH data.

- Based on program output data from the Lead Safe Providence Program, and projected program capacity data from the Woonsocket Lead Hazard Reduction Program and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the average cost of funding and administering lead hazard reduction is somewhere between \$16,000 and \$21,000 per unit. This means that an additional investment of \$20 million per year could lead to between 1250 and 950 units made safe per year, or a total of between 2500 and 1900 units made safe over the course of the 2-year spending period.
- US Treasury Dept's FAQ lists remediation as eligible funded by COVID state/local recovery funds in Qualified Census tracts and/or geographic areas disproportionately affected by COVID-19 - most of RI core cities.
- Funding should also be used to boost Enforcement capacity and implement proactive inspections: Cities responsible for enforcing RI's lead safety standards do not have capacity to proactively enforce. Increased funding for Code & legal staffing + resources boosts ability of cities, ensures rental unit safety prior to complaint or lead poisoning. Increased staff enables them to routinely inspect properties.

Environmental Justice and Equity

- Disparities in child lead poisoning are results & drivers of systemic inequalities. A 2017 Pew report, race & ethnicity are strongly associated with children's risk. A national survey found the average blood lead level of Black children is far higher than of non-Hispanic white & Mexican-American children. Minority communities face risk from older housing with lead paint hazards, with origins in unfair lending & redlining which prohibits people of color from moving into white neighborhoods. These practices contributed to the isolation of impoverished communities & people of color in areas with poorer-quality housing, infrastructure, & air."
- The report also pointed out, "According to the CDC, children living in poverty had significantly higher average blood lead levels than their more affluent peers. This is in part because low-income families tend to rent rather than own their homes, & renters are more likely than owners to face issues associated with inadequate housing, such as lack of complete plumbing facilities in the unit, have more serious constraints on funding for improvements, & depend on landlords to make their homes lead-safe."
- National trends hold true in RI, where, according to maps produced by RIDOH & DataSpark, cities & neighborhoods w/ higher rates of lead poisoning overlap w/ those w/ more BIPOC & low-income households. A 2017 project by Brown students showed percentage of minority population was a significant predictor of lead poisoning incidence by census tract in PVD.

- These disparities lead to disparate outcomes btwn racial & socioeconomic groups: “Exposure to lead has been shown to negatively impact academic performance in early childhood. Rhode Island children with a history of lead exposure, even at low levels, have been shown to have decreased reading readiness at kindergarten entry & diminished reading & math proficiency in the third grade” (RI KidsCount 2020).

Community Resilience

- Funding lead hazard abatement, & boosting City capacity to enforce lead laws are opportunities to address both root causes & effects of systematic racism, classism, & inequality. The same communities that bear the brunt of the burden of lead poisoning & housing injustice will also see the greatest positive impact of these measures.
- Childhood lead poisoning has a lifelong impact on an individual, & when we begin to look at the scale of lead exposure in RI, we can see that preventing lead poisoning will significantly improve community health & resilience on a local & state level. Based on studies from RI & elsewhere, as lead poisoning rates go down, we can also expect to see decreases in violent crime, increases in academic performance & reading & math proficiency in our elementary school students, & decreases in heart disease death in adults, among other benefits. Protecting BIPOC & low-income children from the effects of lead poisoning will help RI begin to close some of the gaps resulting from centuries of discrimination & injustice.
- Remediating lead hazards in our housing stock will also permanently boost RI’s infrastructure, increasing the resilience of our communities across the board, but especially in areas with high renter populations, where residents cannot make decisions to repair their homes or replace their pipes themselves. For RI’s homeowners, these measures will increase the value of their properties, & decrease risk of liability in cases of lead exposure on their properties. A safer & healthier housing stock will encourage more residents to stay & raise families in their homes in RI, & will allow many low-income families to not have to choose between a safe apartment & an affordable one, or to leave an apartment when lead hazards are discovered. This will decrease displacement, increase housing stability, & lead to more socioeconomic diversity & more static communities in many neighborhoods across the state.

Economic Growth

- Increasing funding to lead hazard abatement programs, & increasing capacity of City housing code enforcement staff will not only improve the health & development of RI’s children, as well as increase the value of our housing stock in the short-term, but will also result in a significant return on investment for our communities in the long-term, in terms of both economic benefit & quality of life.
- Increased funding for financial assistance for property owners to remediate lead hazards in their homes will significantly boost the safety & value of our housing stock, in addition to preventing

costs associated with the long-term effects of lead poisoning. A study by Elise Gould at EPI concluded that: “benefits from preventing lead poisoning, especially for children six & under, far exceeds the costs of lead hazard remediation...‘Even under the most conservative analysis, for every dollar spent on controlling lead hazards, at least \$17 would be returned via improved health outcomes, increased IQ, higher lifetime earnings, increased tax revenue, less spending on special education & reduced criminal activity.’”

- The benefit to our housing stock goes beyond the effects of lead poisoning alone. Many homes do not currently meet standards required for the use of Housing Choice Vouchers, and/or standards required to house foster children. Making homes safer on a broad scale will make more homes available to voucher holders, foster children, & families with young children who may be (illegally) denied housing due to lead hazard concerns. In the long term, this will also reduce costs associated with homelessness & displacement.
- Increased funding must go hand in hand with enforcement of lead safety standards. In the short-term, increased enforcement will funnel more property owners into lead hazard abatement & other home repair funding programs, & in the longer-term, will set a precedent for RI’s communities & raise expectations of basic housing safety standards for investors purchasing & newly renting out properties in our state. “ From a financial standpoint, this benefits landlords & homeowners. Maintaining neighborhood property values also benefits the entire locality because it preserves the local tax base. According to ChangeLab Solutions, “by ensuring that landlords are aware of poor conditions before they worsen, systematic code enforcement encourages preventative maintenance, which is more cost effective than deferred maintenance, & thereby helps landlords to maintain their properties.”

Community Partnership & Technical Support

- Initiatives outlined above require outreach, education, training, recruitment, oversight to succeed. Childhood Lead Action Project (CLAP) is well-equipped & more than qualified to fill these roles, in partnership w/ organizations & agencies listed above. Our past accomplishments in these areas have earned local & national recognition, including a prestigious Children’s Environmental Health Excellence Award from EPA. Recent funders include: U.S. EPA, RIDOH (CDC lead grant subgrantee, RI AG’s office environmental settlement subgrantee), the RI Foundation, & the UWRI. Most recently, we received support from the National Center for Healthy Housing (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation subgrantee) including technical support provided by EDF specifically to help us prepare to launch the new phase of our long term campaign for lead-free drinking water.
- CLAP can help leverage relationships w/ other local social & economic justice, & housing organizations, placing lead poisoning prevention into a bigger picture of housing justice & tenants’ rights. This work will need to be in conjunction w/ & promote workforce development (lead-safe work practices & contractor training), *pro bono* legal assistance, affordable housing development, etc.

- Other proposed partners include:
 - City Lead Enforcement Coordination groups & Community Lead Safety Coalitions convened by CLAP.
 - CLAP facilitates active local lead poisoning prevention coordination groups committed to implementing efficient strategies to eliminate childhood lead poisoning in target cities. Members of the committee in Providence include: city housing/building code officials, water state lead/healthy homes enforcement officials, local lead poisoning case managers, community members with essential knowledge about local needs & concerns, health professionals, educators, & lead abatement funders.
 - Separate from this multi-stakeholder coordination group, we also regularly convene strategy sessions with our community coalitions attended by community members & activists where we can work together more freely to develop a community-based agenda for advocacy & awareness-raising to guide our efforts overall.
 - RI Department of Health
 - City of PVD Lead Safe Providence Program, City of Woonsocket Lead Hazard Reduction Program, RI Housing LeadSafe Homes Program
 - Municipal Code/Planning/Legal Dept.s
 - RI Center for Justice, RI Legal Services
 - HousingWorksRI at Roger Williams University