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The Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority Did Not Have Adequate Oversight of Lead-Based Paint in Its Public Housing

WASHINGTON DC— Today, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of Inspector General issued a report examining the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority’s (Authority) management of cases of children with elevated blood lead levels and oversight of lead-based paint and associated hazards in its public housing program.

The Authority is one of the 10 largest public housing authorities (PHA) in the country with approximately 6,500 public housing units, the majority of which were constructed before the U.S. Consumer Products and Safety Commission banned lead-based paint in 1978 to reduce the risk of lead poisoning in children. HUD’s Lead Safe Housing Rule (LSHR) established specific actions or procedures that PHAs are required to perform for hazard reduction of lead-based paint and lead-based paint hazards. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust are some of the most hazardous sources of lead for children in the United States and can cause adverse effects such as damage to the brain and nervous system, slowed growth and development, and learning and behavioral problems.

The Authority did not comply with HUD’s reporting and verification requirements for cases of children with elevated blood lead levels. The Authority did not report 10 confirmed cases of children with elevated blood lead levels to HUD or notify HUD that it was unable to verify 4 additional cases. In several cases, the Authority painted over deteriorated lead-based paint after it learned of an elevated blood lead level, compromising the required environmental investigation designed to determine the source of children’s lead exposure. The Authority stated that it was not aware of certain HUD requirements for managing cases of children with elevated blood lead levels; however, it should have been aware of and implemented those requirements.

The Authority also did not adequately manage lead-based paint and lead-based paint hazards in its public housing. The review found that the Authority did not perform timely visual assessments for nearly 77 percent of the units that had lead-based paint within the required time frame and was missing key information in 47 percent of its lead-based paint inspections and risk assessments. It also could not support its determination that nearly 63 percent of the units and associated developments were “lead free” and therefore required no further action. In addition, HUD OIG found that the Authority did not provide accurate lead disclosures to tenants for more than 49 percent of the units, including five units that later had a child with a reported elevated blood lead level.

As a result of the Authority’s failure to report and notify HUD of elevated blood lead level cases and related environmental investigations, HUD was unable to perform its oversight responsibilities of ensuring that the Authority appropriately investigated the associated units to identify and remediate lead hazards. Further, because of the Authority’s inadequate management of lead-based paint in its units, households that participated

in its public housing program were at an increased risk of being exposed to lead-based paint hazards, particularly families with children under 6 years of age.

“The Lead Safe Housing Rule and HUD’s environmental safety requirements for public housing authorities exist to ensure that families living in housing with lead and lead-based paint hazards are protected,” said Inspector General Rae Oliver Davis. “HUD and the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority must act now to improve oversight of suspected cases of elevated blood lead levels in children, its disclosures to families about the risks of lead-based paint in its housing units, and how it manages the risk of households being exposed to lead-based paint hazards. We appreciate the improvements made by the Authority during our audit and remain committed to working closely with HUD as the Authority addresses our recommendations.”

HUD OIG made several key recommendations the Authority must take to improve its procedures and controls concerning cases of elevated blood lead levels, environmental investigations and timeliness of visual assessments for lead-based paint, and staff training and technical assistance.

Anyone with information about environmental hazards and unsafe unit conditions in HUD housing or fraud, waste, abuse, misconduct, or mismanagement related to HUD programs should contact the HUD OIG Hotline at 1-800-347-3735 or reporting online at <https://www.hudoig.gov/hotline>.

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