Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 14, 2012

Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Dr. Frieden:

In January, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Advisory Committee on Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention recommended that the CDC, for the first time in 20 years, update its threshold for diagnosing lead poisoning by cutting the allowable blood level of lead in half, from ten micrograms per deciliter of blood to five micrograms. We urge you to adopt this more protective threshold and not allow budgetary and political interference to get in the way of CDC carrying out its mission of protecting the health and well being of children in this country.

The recommendation provided by the CDC Advisory Committee on Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention came after the committee assessed the existing medical literature to reevaluate the levels of lead in blood that are related to adverse health impacts in children. The threshold level that is recommended is essentially the level at which protective actions would be triggered by doctors, health departments and parents. Ignoring this threshold could potentially result in children with unsafe levels of lead being denied critical services and treatment.

As decades of science have taught us, lead exposure is particularly risky for children six years of age and younger. It affects the nervous system and can cause a range of health effects, from behavioral problems and learning disabilities, to seizures and death. Pregnant women are also susceptible, as pregnancy releases lead that is stored in the bones, causing brain damage, decreased mental abilities, premature births and reduced growth of the developing fetus. More recent research also has found that lead exposure can impact adults' memory, concentration, hearing and vision and among other things can cause muscle and joint pain. Given lead's broad and significant health impacts, many scientists have argued that no level of lead in the body should ever be considered safe.

It is our understanding that if this new recommended guideline is adopted, the number of U.S. children that would be considered to be lead-poisoned and, therefore in need of medical monitoring and follow-up, will increase by approximately 200,000. While the CDC and federal government in conjunction with the states have been very successful in reducing lead poisoning in our nation's children, this means that there are

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still 450,000 children across this country with lead levels that cause concern among public health officials.

The CDC has a very important job to monitor, follow-up, educate and research lead poisoning in our communities. CDC's lead poisoning prevention program funds state and local health departments to screen children before kindergarten for elevated blood lead levels and helping to ensure that lead-poisoned infants and children receive medical and environmental follow-up, and developing neighborhood-based efforts to prevent childhood lead poisoning. However, as a result of language included in the federal budget for fiscal year 2012, the CDC lead prevention program has been cut by more than 90 percent — from $29 million in fiscal year 2011 to $2 million. Due to this budget reduction, 34 states and the District of Columbia have been informed that, after September 1, 2012, CDC will no longer be able to fund the Lead Poisoning Prevention Program. The CDC is also in the process of reducing staffing for the program from 26 to six full time employees.

We understand that these budget decisions have put the agency under great constraints, but we urge, for the purposes of continued education and community outreach, that the CDC does not allow politics to get in the way of adopting a threshold that would protect our nation's children from a known and often avoidable attack on their health and well-being.

Sincerely,

Rep. Edward J. Markey

Rep. Henry A. Waxman

Rep. Louise Slaughter

Rep. Elijah E. Cummings

Rep. Barney Frank

Rep. Bobby Rush

Rep. G.K. Butterfield

Rep. Jim Moran

Rep. Anna Eshoo

Rep. John Lewis

Rep. Eliot Engel

Rep. Jerrold Nadler

Rep. Richard Neal

Rep. Dennis Kucinich

Rep. Jim McGovern

Rep. Charles Rangel

Rep. Niki Tsongas

Rep. Doris Matsui

Rep. Steven Rothman

Rep. Jackie Speier

Rep. Raúl Grijalva

Rep. Grace Napolitano

Rep. Stephen Lynch

Rep. Russ Carnahan

Rep. Lois Capps

Rep. Jan Schakowsky

Rep. Betty McCollum

cc:
The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services