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February 26, 2024

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **FAVORABLE** – SB983 – Hunting – Lead and Lead-Based Ammunition – Phase Out

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI), I offer this testimony in support of SB983. I serve as Chair of the Maryland Lead Poisoning Prevention Commission and as a member of the EPA Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee, the CDC Lead Exposure and Prevention Advisory Committee and the Maryland Green and Healthy Homes Task Force. GHHI is dedicated to addressing the social determinants of health and advancing racial and health equity through the creation of healthy, lead safe and energy efficient homes. GHHI has been at the frontline of lead poisoning prevention and holistic healthy housing for over three decades.

Over its 30-year history, GHHI has developed the holistic energy efficiency, health and housing service delivery model that is implemented in our nationally recognized, Maryland-based direct service program. The model was adopted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and is currently being advanced in partner jurisdictions nationally. In addition, GHHI helped to elevate Maryland as a national leader in healthy housing by helping reduce childhood lead poisoning by 99% in the state and helping design over 49 pieces of healthy housing legislation that became law in the State of Maryland and local jurisdictions. By delivering a standard of excellence, GHHI aims to eradicate the negative health impacts of unhealthy housing and unjust policies to ensure better health, economic, and social outcomes for children, seniors and families with an emphasis on Black and Brown low-income communities. GHHI's holistic intervention approach was recently cited by EPA and HUD as a model for effective coordination of federal healthy homes and weatherization programs and resources.

We are deeply committed in our mission to advance racial and health equity, economic mobility and climate resiliency through healthy and energy efficient low-income homes. By phasing out lead in ammunition for hunting, SB983 will address a source of lead in our environment that contaminates our soil, water and food chain - placing children, adults and wildlife at risk of exposure.

Impact of Lead Poisoning in Maryland

In 2021, there were 1,430 children with elevated blood levels (EBLs) of 5 µg/dl or higher in Maryland. Lead poisoning from primarily lead in paint, dust and contaminated soil contributes to significant learning disabilities, loss of IQ, speech development problems, attention deficit disorder, poor school performance and violent, aggressive behavior that heavily burdens low-income communities. Lead poisoning directly contributes to the cycle of learning disabilities, poor school performance, steep school dropout rates and juvenile delinquency that prevent low-income children in particular in Maryland from being able to thrive and which burdens the State through increased special education and criminal justice costs. Children poisoned by lead are 7 times more likely to drop out of school and 6 times more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system. In 2012, the CDC determined that there was no safe level of lead in a child's body and lowered the blood lead reference level from 10 µg/dl to 5 µg/dl for children. In, 2021, the CDC reviewed all the available blood lead data in the United States and the scientific research and lowered the blood lead reference level accordingly to 3.5 µg/dl due to the impact of lead exposure even at lower lead levels. For adults, lead poisoning can cause high blood pressure, cognitive impairment, kidney damage, increased risk of cardiovascular disease and reproductive health issues for both men and women, especially pregnant women.

Addressing Sources of Lead in Ammunition

While significant progress has been made in the fight to end the tragic and insidious disease of childhood lead poisoning, children, adults and communities remain at risk due to the numerous sources of lead in our environment. Lead-based paint and lead dust in older housing remains the primary source of lead poisoning, but SB983 addresses an issue that has been overlooked and requires attention – lead in ammunition.

Children ingest lead at a greater rate than adults and are more susceptible to the toxic effects of lead. These sources of lead exposure can harm cognitive, behavioral and physical development of a child even at lower blood lead levels. Adults are also at risk from lead in ammunition that is unintentionally released into our air, soil and water ecosystems by hunters. Hunters can be exposed to lead vapors that are inhaled during the discharging of a firearm. Hunters, their families and other consumers can be directly exposed to lead bullets or shot that remains in wild game (deer, birds) and is consumed by unsuspecting hunters and others. Lead ammunition can also end up back in the food chain from lead that is extracted by vegetables from the soil where lead bullets and lead shot is deposited. Lead shot can make its way into our public water systems, or more acutely, into well water in individual homes that may become contaminated. be hunters risk. Lastly, hunters can be exposed to lead residue when cleaning their firearms or handling lead ammunition.

Lead from ammunition is a direct threat to wildlife, especially birds and other animals, that ingest lead shot when they mistake for a food source or when they consume an animal that has been shot with lead ammunition. This lead ingestion in animals can cause dramatic harmful health effects up to and including death.

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Lead free alternatives exist for ammunition including steel, copper, bismuth, and tungsten. Maryland should lead the way by passing this important legislative to phase out a known, preventable source of lead. The State of California passed Assembly Bill 711 which banned the use of lead ammunition for all hunting starting in 2019. Maryland must follow California's lead to avoid lead exposures and help achieve the over-arching goal of ending lead poisoning by reducing another source of lead exposure in our environment while also protecting wildlife from this harmful toxin.

We ask for a Favorable Report on SB983.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Ann Norton', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Ruth Ann Norton
President and CEO