

Environmental Justice Policy feedback

The Office of Fair Housing & Equity strives to ensure fair and equitable access to housing and employment opportunities by reducing barriers to opportunity for people living and working in Boston. A housing issue of particular concern in Boston is lead-based paint in homes. While it has been banned for almost 40 years, lead paint continues to poison children and serve as a barrier to housing for many families in Boston. In response to the high amount of childhood lead poisoning and reports of housing discrimination, Mayor Walsh launched the Boston Lead Paint Initiative in 2014. This group represents an interagency effort to bridge the gap between public health issues and fair housing by (1) reducing the occurrences of lead poisoning and discrimination and (2) increasing the amount of lead-safe homes and lead-related education. The goal of this feedback is to encourage that EJ communities are receiving attention in all areas, including fair housing.

Page 5: Environmental Justice Population definition

- Lead poisoning should be separate from the cancer and asthma EJ descriptor
- Should read something similar to: “Childhood lead poisoning rates are higher than federal recommendation in a given census tract.”
- Or for the purpose of ensuring housing equity in all neighborhoods, an EJ community could also be defined as a census tract with a certain percentage of pre-1978 housing, in addition to being a low-income household.
- The definition should also include wording that mentions a higher risk of childhood lead poisoning for pre-1978 homes in the New England area/Northeast region of the country.
- The words “federal recommendation” should be used instead of 5 because the definition of EJ population will not be reviewed again for 10 years, and the CDC may lower recommendation within that time period.

Page 10: Public Health section of Targeting Compliance, Enforcement, and Technical Assistance

- Lead paint is still a serious issue and can be a barrier to safe & healthy housing for families. The Massachusetts lead law requires property owners to de-lead their property if a child under age 6 will reside there. If a property owner knows or suspects there is lead paint present in their home, he/she will illegally discriminate by not renting to pregnant women, or individuals who have a child under 6 living with them.
- Section 23 could read something similar to: “Require EEA and MassDep to coordinate with appropriate city authorities and provide assistance for municipalities managing environmental issues potentially affecting public health and equity, including access to fair housing and efforts focused on EJ communities.”
- A section emphasizing the importance of state/federal partnerships supporting fair housing in EJ populations could be added: “Public Health and Fair Housing. On a regular and ongoing basis, the EEA shall encourage/recommend partnerships between the CDC, EPA, other relevant federal agencies, and state/local entities working towards fair housing for all populations.”

