

Advocates Call for Smoke-Free Public Housing

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Washington – The Childhood Asthma Leadership Coalition, a diverse group of prominent voices for children with asthma, released a letter today, urging United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Julián Castro to issue regulations making all government-subsidized housing smoke free. The letter was signed by nine organizations advocating for children and public health.

“America’s leading voices for children and public health are sending HUD a clear message: it’s time to protect children,” said Katie Horton, Research Professor at Milken Institute School of Public Health at the George Washington University.

Asthma is the most prevalent chronic health condition among children, and the condition is even more common among children living in public housing. The letter notes that exposure to secondhand smoke aggravates asthma symptoms in more than as many as a million children every year, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The letter also notes that making federally subsidized housing smoke-free would also address racial disparities in health outcomes. Citing a federal interagency taskforce on asthma disparities, the letter observes that asthma rates for African American and Puerto Rican children – both groups over-represented in public housing – are double asthma rates for White children.

The proposed reform would also make economic sense, according to the letter’s authors. They cite a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention analysis estimating that making federally-subsidized housing smoke-free would net annual savings of \$497 million in avoided health care and housing-related costs.

“With the stroke of a pen, Secretary Castro can mitigate the most common chronic health problem for children, reduce racial health disparities, and save a half-billion dollars a year in health care and housing related costs. This should be a no-brainer,” said Horton.

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