

# THE NEW HEALTHY HOUSING LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE: HOW IT WORKS

The Healthy Housing Local Action Challenge provides a structured pathway and recognition for cities seeking to reduce home-based health hazards such as lead and asthma triggers.

**The Local Action Challenge is divided into three Action Areas.** Cities complete actions to earn points (1 point per action) and receive recognition.

## ACTION AREA 1

**Identify and assess** the city's healthy housing needs.

## ACTION AREA 2

**Implement a policy, program, or practice** that improves healthy housing.

## ACTION AREA 3

**Evaluate the impact** of the implemented policy, program, or practice and share that information with other cities interested in doing the same.

# ACTION AREA 1

## IDENTIFY AND ASSESS HEALTHY HOUSING NEEDS.

Cities can undertake these activities to identify healthy housing needs and assess how those needs could be met.

### Action: Needs Assessor

Complete a healthy housing needs assessment to evaluate current city- and state-level housing policies, programs, and practices to understand the current housing landscape and barriers to changing unhealthy housing conditions.

- ◆ Analyze city-level and other data regarding housing quality, historic code violations, and health outcomes, such as asthma or elevated blood lead levels due to housing quality.
- ◆ Focus on health and racial disparities across these categories.
- ◆ Include stakeholders from “all” communities, especially underserved and overrepresented communities to identify their community’s needs. (See cities in action - [Rochester, New York](#), and [Las Vegas, Nevada](#))

### Action: Community Engager

Engage [multilevel community stakeholders](#), including residents, property owners and impacted minority groups, through at least two meetings, or a survey and a meeting to:

- ◆ Assess existing resources and current gaps in healthy housing resources, policy, and enforcement.
- ◆ Determine how this assessment could help lay the groundwork for a future policy, program, or practice. (See a city in action - [Greensboro, North Carolina](#))

### Action: Findings Disseminator

Identify a partner that has existing research or data on health and housing, such as a local university or health system, or explore existing databases, like [City Health Dashboard](#) or [mySidewalk](#).

- ◆ Collaborate with this partner or use existing research and data from the “Needs Assessor” activity above to analyze city or neighborhood trends and disparities in health and housing outcomes.
- ◆ Disseminate findings through the community or multi-sector coalition to engage residents and stakeholders to shape further action and efforts.

### Action: Support Identifier

Engage community leaders, agencies, and organizations who serve underrepresented communities, to collaborate or apply for grants or funding. This could include:

- ◆ Working with environmental agencies to provide grants or set guidelines or collaborating with state-level agencies to set stronger statewide standards for building codes and inspections.
- ◆ Identifying and applying for relevant healthy homes grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. [Obtain](#) more information.

## ACTION AREA 2

### IMPLEMENT A POLICY, PROGRAM, OR PRACTICE THAT IMPROVES HEALTHY HOUSING

Action Area 2 provides activities for implementation.

#### Action: Advocate Identification

If the policy(s), program(s), or practice(s) you wish to pursue requires funding, approval, or support from city council or other local governing boards, identify and engage with city leadership or council members who prioritize housing or health issues.

- ◆ Have this person commit to being the “advocate” within city council or city leadership to guide the process through the relevant and necessary policy hurdles.
- ◆ Having the city manager support the proposal can improve the likelihood of it passing.

#### Action: Commitment to Sustainable Solutions

Propose a policy, program, or practice. Through a meeting or survey, seek input from stakeholders and community leaders about the concept and implementation efforts.

- ◆ Ensure implementation is a collaborative process to garner input and shared support from stakeholders.
- ◆ Emphasize addressing health and racial disparities throughout the process. (See a city in action - [Syracuse, New York](#))

### Action: Roadblocks and Consequences Identifier

Conduct at least two meetings with stakeholders and decision-makers to ascertain likely barriers—including financial, social, political, or stakeholder objections. A policy, program, or practice might:

- ◆ Have unintended economic, social, or political consequences, such as raising housing costs or reducing housing availability.
- ◆ Disproportionately impact different communities. After meeting and identifying barriers, collaborate with stakeholders, community leaders, or the coalition to develop ways to mitigate or reduce the identified barriers prior to proposing the policy, program, or practice.

### Action: Timeline and Goals Identified

Once there is shared agreement on the proposed policy, program, or practice, decide on the implementation approach: a phase-in initiative or blanket introduction. Create a timeline with clear goals and deliverables.

- ◆ Phase-in initiatives include programs, policies, or practices that are first implemented in one neighborhood or zip code, typically an area needing the most change or improvement. Then, over months or years, other neighborhoods and zip codes are added with required or incentivized implementation timelines. These initiatives include pilot efforts, demonstration projects, programs for residents of certain neighborhoods or buildings, and programs that are adopted incrementally.
- ◆ Blanket introductions include policies, programs, or practices that are applied simultaneously, citywide. These commonly include citywide ordinances and programs that impact all residents. (See a city in action - [Saint Paul, Minnesota](#))

### Action: Tenant and Property Owner Community Outreach

Conduct tenant outreach through community meetings, pamphlets, community leaders, or other relevant communication methods to:

- ◆ Inform tenants and property owners of the new policy, program, or practice and their rights under current state and local law and policy, as appropriate.
- ◆ Share resources and ways to receive help in improving housing quality. (See a city in action - [Greensboro, North Carolina](#))

## ACTION AREA 3

### EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF THE IMPLEMENTED POLICY, PROGRAM, OR PRACTICE AND SHARE THAT INFORMATION WITH OTHER CITIES INTERESTED IN DOING THE SAME.

The following steps can be used by cities to assess and evaluate the success of the implemented policy, program, or practice.

#### Action: Accountability to Equity

Collaborate with stakeholders such as local universities, health centers, or community leaders and organizations to:

- ◆ Determine the impact that the policy, program, or practice has on improving health and racial equity.
- ◆ Identify future steps to further equity.

#### Action: Evaluator

Utilize available data and resources to understand the effectiveness of the implemented healthy housing policy, program, or practice:

- ◆ Determine if the expected outcomes were achieved through working with a partner from a university, hospital, or other institution.
- ◆ Stakeholder feedback is also useful to determine if the program, policy, or practice is effective.

#### Action: Needs Assessor 2.0

Assess current gaps and community needs after policy, program, or practice implementation:

- ◆ Conduct effective outreach, education, and engagement for the community about the policy, program, or practice.
- ◆ Receive direct feedback from residents and impacted communities.
- ◆ Assess if the community would benefit from additional incentives, stricter enforcement, or other needs. (See a city in action - [Rochester, New York](#))

**Action: Teacher**

Disseminate successes and lessons learned.

- ◆ For instance, this could include press releases, public service announcements, webinars, collaboration with NLC, other cities, universities, or other organizations to highlight the city's progress.
- ◆ Communication approaches should facilitate the spread and scale of successful healthy housing initiatives. This could be targeted to other interested cities for a city's work to be used as an example; or local, state, or federal governmental entities to ensure or enable future support mechanisms.

# EARNING POINTS AND RECOGNITION

Cities receive one point for each Challenge Action they complete. Points from different Action Areas can be combined for recognition, and cities do not need to complete all challenges within an Action Area.

## NLC WILL HONOR YOU WITH RECOGNITION

When you first join the Local Action Challenge, and when you achieve a new milestone—**Innovator, Leader, Champion**, and eventually, **Healthy Housing Change Agent** status—NLC will acknowledge your commitment and good work to your city community and other cities nationwide.

## RECOGNITION STRUCTURE

				
<b>JOIN THE LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE</b>	<b>INNOVATOR</b>	<b>LEADER</b>	<b>CHAMPION</b>	<b>CHANGE AGENT</b>
<b>YOUR CITY PLEDGES TO COMPLETE AN ACTION</b>	COMPLETE 3 ACTIONS	COMPLETE 7 ACTIONS	COMPLETE 11 ACTIONS	COMPLETE 14+ ACTIONS
When you join, you gain:	When you become an <b>Innovator</b> , you gain:	When you become a <b>Leader</b> , you gain:	When you become a <b>Champion</b> , you gain:	When you become a <b>Change Agent</b> , you gain:
Access to Healthy Housing Peer Learning Lab quarterly calls with a community of cities tackling healthy housing	Recognition certificate to your city with designation of Healthy Housing Innovator	Recognition plaque to your city with designation of Healthy Housing Leader	Recognition plaque to your city with designation of Healthy Housing Champion	Coverage in NLC publications
Onboarding and office hours with national experts and connections to partners	Eligibility for special opportunities to convene with governmental stakeholders	Travel scholarships for city staff to attend in-person convenings	A case study of your city published in the next annual Healthy Housing Local Action Challenge blog post	Opportunities to connect with new audiences
A press release template to announce your city's pledge	Recognition at NLC's annual membership meetings, including conference ribbons at City Summit and the Congressional Cities Conference	Eligibility to lead a Healthy Housing Peer Learning Discussion	A featured speaking opportunity each year	Attendance and public recognition at related NLC events

- Each additional Action will gain you:
- A listing in the healthy housing newsletter
  - A printed certificate mailed to your City

## YOUR ULTIMATE CHALLENGE: BECOME A HEALTHY HOUSING CHANGE AGENT

If your city has earned more than 14 points, you earn the title **Healthy Housing Change Agent**.

# SUPPORT TO CITIES ENGAGED IN THE LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

NLC and partner organizations will provide participating city leaders with specific, technical, ongoing support as you work across all three Action Areas. Join the Local Action Challenge for:

- ◆ **Quarterly** NLC Peer Learning Lab engagements to discuss your work with other cities in the Local Action Challenge and hear best practices from peer cities and national experts
- ◆ **Onboarding calls** for new members to identify your priorities and orient you to existing resources
- ◆ **Office hours** with Learning Lab speakers and opportunities for individual follow-up with subject matter experts
- ◆ **Curated resources** and city examples on healthy housing best practices – see resources below

## ACTION RESOURCES

### NLC SPECIFIC RESOURCES

The National League of Cities has identified several examples of city action to improve healthy housing. NLC presents the following initiative reports as **examples for other cities to consider**.

- ◆ Report: [Advancing City-Level Healthy Housing](#)
- ◆ Stakeholder Brief: [Gaining Community Health Allies for Healthy Homes Programs](#)
- ◆ Stakeholder Brief: [Aligning Housing Quality with Diverse Community Interests](#)
- ◆ Stakeholder Brief: [Building Governmental Support for Healthy Housing](#)
- ◆ Message Guide: [Advancing Health and Equity Through Housing](#)



## EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES

These successful, notable city initiatives are **examples of best practices for your review:**

- 1. Proactive Identification:** Proactive Rental Inspection.  
Cities identify healthy housing issues before they lead to poor health outcomes by creating regular home inspections. ([Sacramento, California](#))
- 2. Reactive Identification:** Targeted Registration and Inspection.  
Cities use targeted inspections or policies to address and identify the root causes of housing-based health hazards, targeted to a sector, or focused on building rehabilitation. ([Kansas City, Missouri](#) and [Greensboro, North Carolina](#))
- 3. Reward and Penalty Systems:** Performance-Based Rental Licensing.  
Cities incentivize landlords to address housing violations by reducing licensing and registration costs for landlords who consistently maintain healthy housing. ([New Haven, Connecticut](#))
- 4. Third-Party Identification:** Third-Party Violation Reporting.  
Cities allow neutral third parties, such as healthcare providers, to report housing violations so renters can avoid landlord retaliation. ([Boston Massachusetts](#))
- 5. Interventions for Healthy Housing Issues:** Targeted Arbitration Systems.  
Cities design and implement legal mechanisms where tenants, landlords, and City officials can work to resolve housing issues through use of an arbiter, such as creating a Lead Court to reduce blood lead levels in children. ([Philadelphia, Pennsylvania](#))
- 6. Rent Withholding Mechanisms:** Rent Escrows.  
Tenants or the City place rent money in separate escrow accounts that only allow landlords access after they address healthy housing concerns or code violations. ([Detroit, Michigan](#), and [Los Angeles, California](#))

## EXPLORE THE CURRENT CITIES IN ACTION

These cities exemplify the efforts of the Local Action Challenge. They have developed ways to intervene in unhealthy housing practices in order to improve the quality and safety of their city's existing rental properties and the well-being of their residents.

- ◆ [Saint Paul, Minnesota](#). Creating additional, needed rental assistance.
- ◆ [Sacramento, California](#). Established a rental housing inspection program to reduce code violations.
- ◆ [Kansas City, Missouri](#). Established a rental housing inspection program setting health and safety standards.
- ◆ [Greensboro, North Carolina](#). Made changes to housing code to address hazardous living conditions.
- ◆ [New Haven, Connecticut](#). Established a three-tiered inspection program to ensure safety, health, and welfare of residents.
- ◆ [Boston, Massachusetts](#). Created a system for health providers to report housing that contributes to asthma in their patients.
- ◆ [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania](#). Developed incentives for landlords to address lead hazards.
- ◆ [Detroit, Michigan](#). Established rent escrow accounts for tenants living with housing code violations.
- ◆ [Los Angeles, California](#). Established rent escrow accounts for tenants living with housing code violations.
- ◆ [Las Vegas, Nevada](#). Developed an initiative to increase opportunities for health, social, and economic well-being.
- ◆ [Syracuse, New York](#). Enhanced enforcement of code violations to improve healthy housing.
- ◆ [Rochester, New York](#). Conduct housing needs assessment and collaborate with universities and non-governmental organizations.

For additional information, contact [healthyhousing@nlc.org](mailto:healthyhousing@nlc.org)

# NLC LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

## CITY IN ACTION – SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

Rental assistance programs have been shown to reduce psychological distress by providing safety and reduced rent costs. Programs that allow families to move to areas with lower poverty rates result in major health improvements, including lower rates of diabetes, domestic violence, alcohol and drug use, and better mental health.<sup>1,2</sup> Federal rental assistance, such as Housing Choice Vouchers, Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance, and public housing options exist, covering more than 10 million people. But still, about 16 million low-income households that need rental assistance do not receive any from the federal government, making city efforts to provide rental assistance crucial.

During the pandemic, COVID-19 emergency funding and already existing federal rental assistance programs brought help at a critical time. Cities like Saint Paul provided additional funding: In March 2020, the City Council allocated \$3.3 million from the Housing and Redevelopment Authority budget to the St. Paul Bridge Fund, providing \$1,000 grants to families living at or below 40% of the area median income. By October 2021, more than 5,200 applications were submitted for the family grant, and 1,265 families were awarded assistance. Of these, 66% were renters and 63% were from areas of concentrated poverty where the majority of the residents are people of color.<sup>3</sup>

**For additional information, contact [healthyhousing@nlc.org](mailto:healthyhousing@nlc.org)**

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<sup>1</sup> Fischer W, Rice D, Mazzara A. Research Shows Rental Assistance Reduces Hardship and Provides Platform to Expand Opportunity for Low-Income Families. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. December 5, 2019. [https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/research-shows-rental-assistance-reduces-hardship-and-provides-platform-to-expand#\\_ftn2](https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/research-shows-rental-assistance-reduces-hardship-and-provides-platform-to-expand#_ftn2)

<sup>2</sup> Gubits D, Shinn M, Bell S, et al. Family Options Study: Short-Term Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families. Prepared for Department of Housing and Urban Development. July 2015. [http://www.huduser.org/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/FamilyOptionsStudy\\_final.pdf](http://www.huduser.org/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/FamilyOptionsStudy_final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Bridge Fund Family Dataset. Saint Paul, Minnesota. Updated January 28, 2022. <https://information.stpaul.gov/datasets/stpaul::bridge-fund-family-dataset/about>

# NLC LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

## CITY IN ACTION – SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

In 2008, Sacramento implemented a Rental Housing Inspection program. Landlords register their properties with the city and pay annual fees for the program. The city requires unit inspections. If there are more than one rental housing unit on a property, the program requires an annual inspection of the common areas and a random inspection of 10% of the rental units. If these randomly inspected units have violations, the inspector can conduct additional inspections of the units on the property. This program was immensely successful. Within four years of the program's inception, 22,650 rental units were inspected and 51,915 violations were reported. Housing and dangerous building cases were reduced by 22%.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Report to Council, City Council of Sacramento, Ordinance Revisions to City Code Chapter 8.120 Relating to the Rental Housing Inspection Program. May 28, 2013.

[http://sacramento.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=22&clip\\_id=3277&meta\\_id=399614](http://sacramento.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=22&clip_id=3277&meta_id=399614)

# NLC LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

## CITY IN ACTION – KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

Kansas City incrementally implemented their Healthy **Homes Rental Inspection Program**, initiated by policy change. It sets health and safety standards for rental housing in the city and requires that rental units are inspected and given permits before landlords can rent to tenants. In recognition that the city lacked the resources to implement a citywide certificate of compliance program, Kansas City elected to use a phased approach allocating resources as they become available. The city prioritized areas of the city with:

1. Thirty percent or more of housing units dedicated to rental units.<sup>1</sup>
2. Sound but declining housing inventory that exhibited substantial deterioration but little to no dilapidation.
3. A demonstrated neighborhood resident interest and support for this program, and for systematic housing inspections overall.

One year after program implementation, 67,000 units were registered and approximately 1,000 violations were identified. Of these violations, 60% were resolved through collaboration between the Kansas City Health Department and property managers.<sup>2</sup>

**For additional information, contact [healthyhousing@nlc.org](mailto:healthyhousing@nlc.org)**

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<sup>1</sup> Kansas City, Mo. Code of Ordinances § 56-357. [https://library.municode.com/mo/kansas\\_city/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=COORKAMIVOII\\_CH56PRMACO\\_ARTIIREPR\\_DIV7REREDW\\_SDIICECO\\_S56-357IMCECOPR](https://library.municode.com/mo/kansas_city/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=COORKAMIVOII_CH56PRMACO_ARTIIREPR_DIV7REREDW_SDIICECO_S56-357IMCECOPR)

<sup>2</sup> One Year In, Kansas City's Inspection Program Is Improving Conditions For Renters. Up to Date. September 27, 2019. <https://www.kcur.org/show/up-to-date/2019-09-27/one-year-in-kansas-citys-inspection-program-is-improving-conditions-for-renters>

# NLC LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

## CITY IN ACTION – GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

Greensboro's Housing Coalition focuses on community engagement and building trust. Their efforts targeted a large 177-unit housing complex where residents experienced over 100 cases of asthma. The Housing Coalition collaborated with tenants through door-to-door outreach, resident surveys, and regular meetings that culminated in residents speaking to the City Council about hazardous living conditions. In response, the City Council implemented housing code policy changes, including regular inspection of homes built more than five years ago.<sup>1</sup> This housing code adoption reduced housing units with code violations by 77% in eight years.<sup>2</sup> Despite this benefit, in 2011 North Carolina changed state law to only allow inspections with cause. Since this enactment, the Greensboro Housing Coalition experienced an increase in complaints about housing quality and safety.<sup>3</sup>

For additional information, contact [healthyhousing@nlc.org](mailto:healthyhousing@nlc.org)

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<sup>1</sup> Building Governmental 2Support for Healthy Housing. National League of Cities. Accessed February 8, 2022. <https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Housing-Hazards-and-Health-Stakeholders-3.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> McKee-Huger B, Loosemore L. Using housing code enforcement to improve healthy homes. *N C Med J.* 2012;73(5):377-378.

<sup>3</sup> McKee-Huger B, Loosemore L. Using housing code enforcement to improve healthy homes. *N C Med J.* 2012;73(5):377-378.

# NLC LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

## CITY IN ACTION – NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

New Haven implemented a three-tiered inspection program in late 2019 to eliminate housing blight, identify rental units in need of improvement, and ensure the safety, health, and welfare of its residents through licensing. The program requires that rental units must undergo inspections, and owners must obtain Type 1, Type 2, or Type 3 rental property licenses. Rental properties with no more than 10% of dwelling units that fail inspection receive Type 1 licenses, which are valid for three years. Rental properties with 11–33% of dwelling units that fail inspection receive Type 2 licenses, which are valid for two years. Rental properties with 34% or more dwelling units that fail inspection receive Type 3 licenses, which are valid for one year.<sup>1</sup>

Licensing fees are \$200 per unit for the first two rental units and \$50 for every additional unit, so longer rental licenses can save compliant landlords a great deal of money.<sup>2</sup> Owners have thirty days to repair defects and code violations that are either non-safety related or non-life-threatening. If the inspector finds a life-threatening health or safety defect, the rental property license will be denied or revoked. If there is one defect or more found during inspection, the inspector will re-inspect the property until it fully complies with housing codes.<sup>3</sup> Given the recent implementation of this program, the effects of this performance-based rental inspection program are still being assessed.

**For additional information, contact [healthyhousing@nlc.org](mailto:healthyhousing@nlc.org)**

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<sup>1</sup> Article XIV §§ 17-71–17-89. New Residential Business Licenses.  
<https://www.newhavenct.gov/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?blobid=38393>

<sup>2</sup> Breen T. Rental Licensing Revamp Approved. New Haven Independent. September 4, 2019.  
[https://www.newhavenindependent.org/article/lci\\_residential](https://www.newhavenindependent.org/article/lci_residential)

<sup>3</sup> Article XIV §§ 17-71–17-89. New Residential Business Licenses.  
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# NLC LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

## CITY IN ACTION – BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTES

Boston's Breathe Easy at Home program allows healthcare providers to request city inspections of patients' homes if the patients are reporting asthma or other symptoms due to unhealthy housing.<sup>1</sup> The program operates through a web-based portal where providers, based on medical assessment, can make referrals and register complaints about housing conditions their patients are experiencing.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, this program helps patients with asthma, who are more likely to be low-income and minority. Having clinicians initiate housing remediations is an effective way to help patients who may otherwise not have reported substandard housing conditions.<sup>3</sup>

Between 2008 and 2018, health providers submitted an average of 203 referrals annually, which have prompted thousands of inspections and remediations to address Massachusetts Sanitary Code violations and healthy housing education.<sup>4,5</sup> Landlords who receive violations through the Breathe Easy at Home program must bring their rental properties up to code within a certain timeframe or they are taken to court. However, 70% of violations are resolved before any court intervention.<sup>6</sup> Boston's Breathe Easy at Home program has been successful, in part, thanks to the existing healthy housing programming with which it coordinates in Boston, including proactive rental unit inspections at least once every five years.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Advancing City-Level Healthy Housing. National League of Cities and the George Washington University. Accessed December 9, 2021.

[https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/YEF\\_Healthy\\_Housing20WEB.pdf](https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/YEF_Healthy_Housing20WEB.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Breathe Easy at Home. City of Boston. Last updated September 10, 2021.

<https://www.boston.gov/departments/public-health-commission/breathe-easy-home>

<sup>3</sup> Rosofsky A, Reid M, Sandel M, Zielenbach M, Murphy J, Scammell MK. Breathe Easy at Home: A Qualitative Evaluation of a Pediatric Asthma Intervention. *Glob Qual Nurs Res*. 2016;3:2333393616676154. Published 2016 Nov 16. doi:10.1177/2333393616676154

<sup>4</sup> Barros E, Jordan D. Web-based System links Asthma Clinicians to Housing Code Enforcement. Boston Public Health Commission. Accessed December 8, 2021.

<https://maeha.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Eugene-Barros-Darris-Jordan.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Breathe Easy at Home. Boston Public Health Commission. Accessed December 9, 2021.

<https://www.bphc.org/whatwedo/healthy-homes-environment/asthma/Pages/Breathe-Easy-at-Home.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Barros E, Jordan D. Web-based System links Asthma Clinicians to Housing Code Enforcement. Boston Public Health Commission. Accessed December 8, 2021.

<https://maeha.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Eugene-Barros-Darris-Jordan.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Advancing City-Level Healthy Housing. National League of Cities and the George Washington University. Accessed December 9, 2021.

[https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/YEF\\_Healthy\\_Housing20WEB.pdf](https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/YEF_Healthy_Housing20WEB.pdf)



# NLC LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

## CITY IN ACTION – PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Philadelphia has a **Lead Court program** that addresses landlord noncompliance with lead remediation orders. Established in 2002, Philadelphia’s Lead Court is a partnership between the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH), the Office of the City Solicitor, and the Court of Common Pleas.<sup>1</sup> Under the current Lead Court system, housing inspections are triggered when children exhibit elevated blood lead levels. It is possible for landlords who successfully address lead in their rental properties to promptly avoid lead court. However, if lead hazards remain in a rental unit where an occupant has elevated blood lead levels, the case is referred to Lead Court.<sup>2</sup>

Philadelphia’s Lead Court program has been more effective at reducing lead in homes than efforts before the Lead Court; initial failed home inspections for lead hazards prompted just 6.6% of properties to mitigate lead hazards compared to 77% of properties that mitigated lead hazards under the Lead Court program.<sup>3</sup> This program has been especially relevant for Philadelphia, a city where 91% of rental properties were built before the 1978 federal lead ban went into effect.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Advancing City-Level Healthy Housing. National League of Cities. N.D. Accessed December 15, 2020. [https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/YEF\\_Healthy\\_Housing20WEB.pdf](https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/YEF_Healthy_Housing20WEB.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Lead and Healthy Homes Program. City of Philadelphia. Accessed December 10, 2021. <https://www.phila.gov/programs/lead-and-healthy-homes-program/>

<sup>3</sup> Campbell C, Gracely E, Pan S, et al. Public Health and Law Collaboration: The Philadelphia Lead Court Study. *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. 7 (July 1, 2013): pp. 1271-1277. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2012.301076>

<sup>4</sup> Campbell C, Gracely E, Pan S, et al. Public Health and Law Collaboration: The Philadelphia Lead Court Study. *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. 7 (July 1, 2013): pp. 1271-1277. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2012.301076>

# NLC LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

## CITY IN ACTION – DETROIT, MICHIGAN

In Detroit, if landlords do not undergo regular inspections and lead testing, and address identified issues within a reasonable amount of time, tenants have the right to **place their rent money into an escrow account**.<sup>1,2</sup> To protect tenants using escrow accounts, it is illegal for landlords to evict tenants for withholding rent money in this way.<sup>3</sup> Landlords are further incentivized to conduct repairs because they forfeit all rent placed into an escrow account after 90 days of non-compliance. At that point, the tenants receive their money back.<sup>4</sup> Detroit began phasing in registration into the escrow program by zip code in 2018.<sup>5</sup> Implementing inspection was challenging. Just 11% of rental properties in the first zip code targeted for inspection had city clearance to operate, and only 6% of rental units had certificates of compliance in the second zip code to be targeted for inspection. This is a problem, as certificates of compliance include passing housing inspections and being cleared for lead paint.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Detroit's rent escrow account program is not automatic; tenants must apply to put their rent into escrow, and within the first seven months of the program's implementation, no tenant applied for a rent escrow.<sup>7</sup>

For additional information, contact [healthyhousing@nlc.org](mailto:healthyhousing@nlc.org)

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<sup>1</sup> Rental Property Escrow. City of Detroit. Accessed December 10, 2021. <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/buildings-safety-engineering-and-environmental-department/bseed-divisions/property-maintenance/rental-property/rental-property-escrow>

<sup>2</sup> Sands, D. 9 Detroit Renters' Rights your Landlord Doesn't Want you to Know. Curbed Detroit. March 16, 2020. <https://detroit.curbed.com/2020/3/16/21178912/detroit-michigan-landlord-tenant-renter-rights>

<sup>3</sup> Advancing City-Level Healthy Housing. National League of Cities. Accessed December 10, 2021. [https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/YEF\\_Healthy\\_Housing20WEB.pdf](https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/YEF_Healthy_Housing20WEB.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Tenants in non-compliant rental properties in ZIP 48215 now have easy system to place their rent in escrow. City of Detroit. Accessed December 10, 2021. <https://detroitmi.gov/news/tenants-non-compliant-rental-properties-zip-48215-now-have-easy-system-place-their-rent-escrow>

<sup>5</sup> Tenants in non-compliant rental properties in ZIP 48215 now have easy system to place their rent in escrow. City of Detroit. Accessed December 10, 2021. <https://detroitmi.gov/news/tenants-non-compliant-rental-properties-zip-48215-now-have-easy-system-place-their-rent-escrow>

<sup>6</sup> MacDonald C. Detroit Landlords Ignoring Rental Inspection Rules, City Says. The Detroit News. August 6, 2018. <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2018/08/07/landlords-ignore-detroit-rental-inspection-regulations-city-says/890469002/>

<sup>7</sup> MacDonald C. Detroit Landlords Ignoring Rental Inspection Rules, City Says. The Detroit News. August 6, 2018. <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2018/08/07/landlords-ignore-detroit-rental-inspection-regulations-city-says/890469002/>

# NLC LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

## CITY IN ACTION – LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles requires owners of rental properties with two or more units to have inspections every four years. The **Rent Escrow Account Program (REAP)** is managed by the City of Los Angeles Housing Community Investment Department. Tenants in units with unaddressed housing code violations can have their rent reduced between 10% and 50%, determined by the Rent Adjustment Commission Regulations and based on the severity of the housing violations.<sup>1</sup> For each month that landlords are in the REAP program and have not fully addressed housing violations, they do not receive the rent they are owed and are required to pay an additional \$50 administrative fee each month for each property unit.<sup>2</sup> To further protect renters, eviction restrictions are put in place while the landlord is in REAP, and rent increases are prohibited until 13 months after the property has left the REAP program.<sup>3</sup> Notably, landlords can request funds from the escrow account to conduct repairs.<sup>4</sup>

For additional information, contact [healthyhousing@nlc.org](mailto:healthyhousing@nlc.org)

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<sup>1</sup> HCIDLA Solutions. What it Costs. Accessed December 10, 2021. <http://www.hcidlasolutions.com/what-it-costs.html>

<sup>2</sup> Rent Escrow Account Program. Los Angeles Housing and Community Investment Department. Accessed December 10, 2021. <http://www.rampasthma.org/D:Web%20Siteswww.rampasthma.orgwp-content/uploads/2019/03/REAP-CHHC-2.19.19.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> R.E.A.P. (Rent Escrow Account Program). IET Real Estate. Accessed December 10, 2021. <https://www.ietrealestate.com/reap.php>

<sup>4</sup> HCIDLA Solutions. What it Costs. Accessed December 10, 2021. <http://www.hcidlasolutions.com/what-it-costs.html>

# NLC LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

## CITY IN ACTION – LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

In 2020, the Las Vegas City Council established a **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiative** (Resolution R-52-2020) to increase opportunities for health, social, and economic well-being.<sup>1</sup> This initiative is staffed through the Office of Community Services, which is responsible for ensuring cross-departmental alignment of equity and inclusion. They are required to provide annual reports to the City Council on goals and outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> July 7 City Council. Las Vegas, Nevada. July 5, 2021.  
<https://www.lasvegasnevada.gov/News/Blog/Detail/july-7-city-council>

<sup>2</sup> November 18 City Council. City of Las Vegas, Nevada. November 16, 2020.  
<https://www.lasvegasnevada.gov/News/Blog/Detail/november-18-city-council>

# NLC LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

## CITY IN ACTION – SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

Syracuse created a **Municipal Violations Bureau** in 2018 to work on code enforcement and relieve some of the legal department's burden. This bureau has an annual operating budget of \$150,000 and an estimated seven part-time judges.<sup>1</sup> The bureau levies fines against property owners with code violations. Minor violations are administered by the bureau, and disputes are settled by an independent arbitrator without going to court. More serious health or safety code violations are handled by the city's attorneys and are likely handled in court.<sup>2</sup> The development of the Municipal Violations Bureau has enabled the city to build upon the existing effort to provide stricter enforcement of code violations and improve healthy housing in the city.

For additional information, contact [healthyhousing@nlc.org](mailto:healthyhousing@nlc.org)

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<sup>1</sup> Magnarelli T. Syracuse Municipal Violations Bureau to take effect this summer, freeing up work in law dept. WRVO. May 9, 2018. <https://www.wrvo.org/politics-and-government/2018-05-09/syracuse-municipal-violations-bureau-to-take-effect-this-summer-freeing-up-work-in-law-dept>

<sup>2</sup> Baker C. With Cuomo's OK, Syracuse now has a new way to fight neighborhood blight. Syracuse.com. Updated January 4, 2019. [https://www.syracuse.com/news/2017/07/with\\_cuomos\\_ok\\_syracuse\\_now\\_has\\_a\\_new\\_way\\_to\\_fight\\_urban\\_blight.html](https://www.syracuse.com/news/2017/07/with_cuomos_ok_syracuse_now_has_a_new_way_to_fight_urban_blight.html)

# NLC LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE

## CITY IN ACTION – ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

Rochester has completed several healthy housing needs assessments through partnerships between the University of Rochester Environmental Health Sciences Center Community Outreach and Engagement Core and the Rochester Healthy Homes Partnership. The needs assessment, conducted after Rochester’s implementation of proactive rental inspection policies, identified needed housing improvements, including improved fire safety and smoke detector utilization and asthma trigger remediation.<sup>1</sup> Needs assessments such as Rochester’s allow for a data-driven understanding of needed work to improve housing standards. They also indicate the value of collaboration with universities and non-governmental organizations.

**For additional information, contact [healthyhousing@nlc.org](mailto:healthyhousing@nlc.org)**

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<sup>1</sup> Kormacher KS, Garrison V. A Healthy Homes Needs Assessment for Rochester, NY. October 14, 2015. <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/MediaLibraries/URMCMedia/environmental-health-sciences-center/COEC/documents/Healthy-Homes-Needs-Assessment-Pilot-Report-101415.pdf>