



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Department of the Environment, Attorney General File Suit Alleging Improper Lead Paint Inspections**

*Complaint charges that inspection company issued lead-free certificates for homes with lead-based paint, includes more than 150 alleged violations*

**BALTIMORE (Feb. 12, 2020)** – The Maryland Department of the Environment and the Maryland Attorney General have filed a lawsuit alleging that a Baltimore County lead inspection company and two of its inspectors violated state laws that protect children from lead paint poisoning after homes were certified as lead-free despite testing that showed they were not.

The suit alleges more than 150 violations by inspection contractor Home Free Lead Inspections, LLC, and inspectors Charles David Gillis and David Brian Gillis. MDE seeks penalties of up to \$25,000 per violation.

"Our state's lead poisoning prevention program is a priority, especially in Baltimore, and enforcement is absolutely essential to its continued success," said Maryland Environment Secretary Ben Grumbles. "Shoddy inspections are unacceptable and preventable through education, training, and necessary and proper enforcement."

The [suit](#) was filed today, Feb. 12, in the Circuit Court for Baltimore City by MDE's attorneys in the Maryland Office of the Attorney General.

"Lead paint poisoning has devastating effects for those exposed, particularly young children," said Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh. "We allege these defendants failed to properly inspect properties as required, jeopardizing the health and safety of thousands of Maryland residents."

Exposure to lead is the most significant and widespread environmental hazard for children in Maryland. Maryland's Reduction of Lead Risk in Housing law requires owners of rental properties built before 1978 to register them with MDE and to meet specific lead paint risk reduction standards. Properties certified lead-free by an accredited inspector are exempt from those requirements. MDE requires applicants to be trained and pass an exam before they are accredited as inspectors.

Home Free Lead Inspections was accredited by MDE as a lead paint abatement services contractor in 2015, according to the suit. Both Charles David Gillis and David Brian Gillis, who was the owner of Home Free Lead Inspections, were accredited by MDE as lead inspectors in 2015. Charles David Gillis performed about 800 lead-free inspections and David Brian Gillis performed about 100 lead-free inspections, according to the suit.

Following a citizen complaint in December 2017, MDE opened an investigation into lead-free inspection certificates issued by Home Free based on inspections performed by the Gillises. MDE's investigation found that in several cases Home Free issued lead-free certificates despite inspections in which Charles Davis Gillis had found lead-based paint at the properties, according to the suit. The suit also identifies instances in which the company issued lead-free certificates based on inadequate inspections that failed to test all surfaces or follow testing methodologies as required by Maryland regulations. An accredited inspection contractor hired by MDE as part of the investigation identified lead-based paint at 147 of 215 properties it inspected, the suit states.

Home Free inspected properties across Maryland but principally in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. In 2018, MDE reviewed its records and found two cases of children with elevated blood lead levels associated with addresses that were the subject of the investigation. MDE found that in one of those cases the elevated blood level was not likely caused by the home.

Also that year, MDE sent notice of its investigation to about 1,800 tenants and property owners, along with a survey to identify homes with young children, pregnant women or chipping or peeling paint. The results of that survey were used to prioritize inspections by MDE's contractor. In 2019, MDE sent about 1,000 more letters surveying residents of properties that had not been re-inspected by the department's contractor and encouraging owners of those properties to have them re-inspected.

Childhood lead poisoning is a completely preventable disease. Children are at the greatest risk from exposure to lead from birth to age 6, while their neurological systems are developing. Exposure to lead can cause long-term neurological damage that may be associated with learning and behavioral problems, and with decreased intelligence.

MDE is the state agency responsible for preventing childhood lead poisoning in Maryland. Since Maryland's lead law was enacted in 1994, the number of childhood lead poisoning cases in the state has decreased by 98%.

Anyone with concerns about issues relating to lead poisoning prevention can call MDE at 410-537-3825.