



CITY OF CLEVELAND
Mayor Justin M. Bibb

Senior Advisor for Lead Accountability

Rebecca Maurer

From: Rebecca Maurer, Senior Advisor for Lead Accountability

To: Mayor Justin M. Bibb

Date: April 24, 2026

Re: 30 Day Report

I am writing to provide an update on my first 30 days serving as your Senior Advisor for Lead Accountability.

You created this role because you are committed to the work we must do to decrease lead poisoning cases. As you know, this is generational work that will unfold over decades. Cleveland has some of the highest lead poisoning rates in the country, so we are taking on something more complicated than other cities face. For that decades-long work to be successful, we know we must get the day-to-day work correct. We must create a strong foundation that builds trust with residents and drives consistent, steady progress.

Scope of My First 30 Days: I spent my first 30 days focused on understanding the challenges in lead-safe home repair spending. As you know, this has been a focus area of mine in the last year. From my prior roles on Council and the Lead Safe Advisory Board, we would hear reports on the high-level spending numbers. But we couldn't get into the day-to-day specifics of administration. However, in this role, I am working directly with staff to understand what is happening.

The clawback of the ODOD dollars heightened the need for this work. With the ODOD dollars, I had noticed slow spending last summer, but the high-level reports seemed positive through the fall and early winter. Then, in February 2026, we learned \$3.3 million was being clawed back, and that the spending hadn't been on track. Losing that money was devastating and frustrating to all of us in the City of Cleveland. I know we don't ever want to lose another dollar that could have gone into home repair.

As a result, the first job you tasked me with was to understand everything about the other bucket of dollars administered at the City that is earmarked for lead-safe home repair. These are the HUD grants that are administered out of Community Development. There are three grants, and they each have upcoming deadlines. However, the biggest grant, which also has the quickest-approaching deadline, has been the focus of my efforts. The High Impact



Neighborhood Grant (HIN) is an \$11.1 million grant where all spending must be under contract by May 29, 2026. All construction must be completed by the end of September 2026.¹

Additionally, I spent time reviewing an additional \$4 million in ARPA allocations that were made in 2023 via Ord. 1286-2023. There was \$3 million allocated to Community Development to cover expenses HUD wouldn't cover, and \$1 million going to the Law Department for prosecutions of Lead Hazard Control Orders where owners weren't engaged in fixing their properties.

From the day I started at City Hall, exploring these programs has been my focus. While I have much more to learn, here is what I've found so far.

Finding #1: The staff working on lead-safe home repair are committed, passionate, and skilled. But bureaucratic and technical restrictions have made grant spending slow. We are making strides to speed things up, but time is of the essence.

When I arrived in Community Development as a member of the Mayor's Office, I found a dedicated and passionate group of employees who want nothing more than to spend dollars to protect kids from lead poisoning. However, they seemed to be hemmed in at every turn by challenges. Seeing their work up close really made me appreciate that we have two enemies in this business: lead and bureaucracy.

For instance, when we set up the HUD program, the City created narrower acceptance guidelines than HUD required, making it hard for us to find qualified participants. We have already worked with the staff to clear up these requirements so that we're operating under HUD's guidelines, not strict ones of our own creation.

Here is an example:

HUD asks that owner-occupants have a child in the home or at least visiting the home. We had a senior citizen who applied for the program after a child was poisoned on his property, and a lead hazard control order (LHCO) was put on his property. He wants to make his property lead safe. The LHCO has resulted in his house being "placarded," meaning children are not supposed to be visiting. He is following that city rule and ensuring that no children are inside his property. This makes it hard for him to see his grandkids as much as he would like. Because his grandkids aren't at his property anymore, we initially turned him down from participating in the program, even though his grandchildren aren't in the home precisely because of the lead issues. He has no means to fix up the property on his own without this program. I supported staff in approving this resident for the program, so long as he states that there *was* a child in the property and that there *will be again* once the lead hazards are fixed.

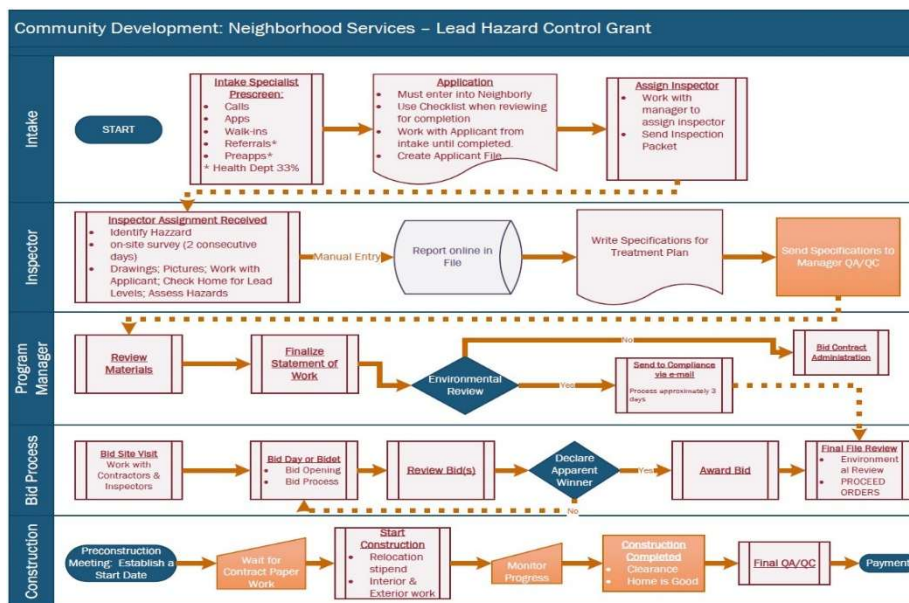
¹ There is a possibility of an extension of 2 months on the term of compliance. But the contracting date is not moveable because the city already requested and received a 1-year extension last May.



There are also technological challenges. Community Development has switched technology platforms several times in recent years. This program used to use paper applications. Then it went to an application called Neighborly. A few years back, Community Development switched to a software program that was developed in-house called PowerApps. Unfortunately, PowerApps was not initially well-equipped to track cases and flag when a case has been sitting for a long time. The Innovation Team from Bloomberg has spent the last year trying to improve the process mapping on PowerApps. But trust in the system is still very low and staff adoption of PowerApps as the single source of truth is mixed. It's taking a lot of staff time to manage the technology, and many people are choosing to create their own spreadsheets, which they then duplicate in PowerApps, slowing everybody down and increasing the risk that cases fall through the cracks.

Disparate filing and case management systems -- PowerApps, Excel tracking, email, paper files -- may also cause challenges as we close out the grant and head into the compliance and closeout period.

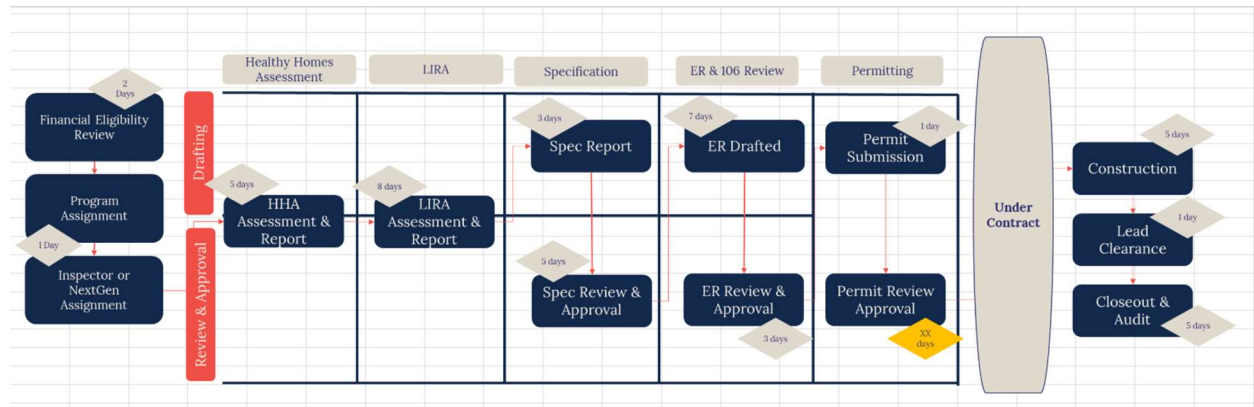
Some type of tracking system is necessary because these HUD grants are complicated. It's not a simple matter of identifying a house and getting a contractor on site. Here was the process flow chart that Community Development was using a few years ago.



You can see it is complex. Two years ago, leaders recognized that this system was not tenable to spend down an \$11 million grant. So, leaders decided to select an “Implementation Vendor” who could handle the construction management and construction in bulk without the City having to manage the contractors. But converting to this new system was itself a slowdown. The



staff are only just getting to the point where the processes are established and jobs are moving smoothly. Here is the current process with date deadlines.



In my 30 days working with the Community Development staff, I have seen the efforts made in the last year to improve the program, and I've seen ways we've accelerated in the last month. However, we must still reconcile with the years of slow progress as the May 29, 2026 deadline approaches. Additionally, the question for city leadership as we move past this individual grant is how to create program structures that don't have so many bureaucratic and technological problems.

Finding #2: *We are struggling to spend allocated dollars on existing home-repair programs. While we've made progress, we've also lost real opportunities due to slow spending.*

Despite these improvements and the good intentions of staff, the reality is that the city has a lot of money left to spend on the HIN grant in a very short amount of time. After over 6 years of work with a goal of 148 units, the city had only completed 40 units over the life of the loan. Most concerning, the city already asked for and received a 1-year extension on the HIN grant in May 2025, but nine months later, we still hadn't made much progress. If the city doesn't hit its "yellow" targets, there are consequences. Not only would we have to return money to the federal government, but we would have limitations in applying for future Lead Hazard Reduction Grants.

Mayor Bibb, you made clear from my first day that we must do everything possible to spend every dollar we can on lead-safe home repair. The year-long work to get the Implementation Vendor on board came to fruition last month, which allowed us to process 19 units of work in one month, an amount we hadn't done in the prior two years.



	As of March 15, 2026	As of April 15, 2026	Targets 70% Yellow ²	Targets 90% Green
Units Completed	40 ³	59	110	133
Units Assessed	114	124	130	167
Spending	\$3,783,308	TBD ⁴	\$7,984,200.00	\$10,265,400.00

You and I are on the same page that we must spend the remaining time on this grant trying to spend every dollar possible to make Cleveland lead safe. Upon my arrival, I worked with the team to bring together partners to find potential applicants and review applications we'd turned down in the past. Through those efforts, we identified over 100 people who expressed interest in the program and are working to convert as many of those people as we can into eligible applicants with all their documentation.

Alongside this work to accelerate spending, we must ensure that program processes are clear and accountable and that they comply with all city and HUD rules. With 7 years of program history including staff and technology turnovers, this work will extend beyond May 2026 into the grant closeout period. I will update you, Council, and the public on the HUD grant as the spring and summer unfold.

I do want to make you aware of two other matters concerning dollars spent on home repair. These updates are related to the \$3 million and \$1 million ARPA allocations for lead-safe work made in 2023 via Ordinance 1286-2023.

The \$3 million ARPA allocation was supposed to go to Community Development to supplement homes that had expenses beyond what HUD would cover. Unfortunately, because of the slow spending on the grants, a year later, we spent little of the corresponding ARPA, and the federal encumbrance deadline was coming up. At the same time, the Administration had a need for capital repair money for park improvements. The Administration decertified \$2.1 million of this \$3 million allocation and it was redirected to those capital repairs. The remaining \$900,000 is encumbered and being used to supplement the HIN grant. About \$400,000 has been spent so

² A few public reports of HIN numbers mis-stated the number of completed units. After reviewing the previous completed jobs, the accurate number as of March 15 was 40 units. In one public statement, the number was given as 75, which was a mis-labeling of the Citywide Grant numbers as HIN numbers.

³ The Yellow and Green targets were updated when the extension was given to Cleveland in May 2025. Previously they had been 346 projected assessments and 312 projected units completed. Those assessments were scaled down because of the average cost per unit to reflect what would get the total spend rate to 70% and 90% respectively.

⁴ Because spending can only be resolved after the final construction bills are submitted, this number updates on a delayed basis.



far, and this balance must be spent by the end of this calendar year. Ensuring that the remaining balance of this \$900,000 is effectively spent on lead-safe programming is a top priority.

The other \$1 million ARPA was supposed to support hiring in the Law Department to prosecute and clear out old Lead Hazard Control Orders. Because this money was designated for salary, it went through revenue recovery, so it does not have the same encumbrance deadline. After allocating the money, it turned out that Law had additional headcount to hire people working on Lead Hazard Control Orders without tapping into these dollars. Most of the dollars are not yet allocated. As I'll talk about in my recommendations, I intend to focus on putting those dollars to work protecting kids from lead poisoning.

Finding #3: There have been serious lapses in communication. We're on a path to apologizing and doing right by the residents as best we can, but these moments are part of us losing trust.

There is one part of this story that is not pleasant, and there is no silver lining to it. It is a mistake, and we all must take accountability for it. Shortly after I arrived, as I began working with staff in Community Development, I realized that nobody seemed to have formal ownership over the central phone number we were using to advertise the program on flyers. The number rang through multiple desks, and different staff members sometimes picked up the phone live when they could. But I soon realized nobody had the passcode for the voicemail box. The voicemail message when you called said that residents would get a call back the next business day.

When we got into the voicemail box with the help of IT, we discovered there were 787 unlistened to voicemails going back to July 2024. It was devastating. Parents, landlords, and healthcare providers – they had all reached out to this number asking about the program. And we simply hadn't gotten back to them. This was made even worse because the program was actively looking for qualified applicants. Lead is already a deep matter of trust in this city. People already feel left out and left behind. And we had just made that broken trust 787 times worse.

Mayor, you knew about this matter as soon as it came up, and I thank you for your swift action. You provided a surge of staffing that allowed us to log every call and make every call back possible within a matter of weeks. We apologized to as many people as we could get on the phone and determined if we were still able to help in any way.

Clevelanders deserve dignity and clarity in their communication. And in this instance, we failed. What we owe to our residents is to figure out what is next: namely, how to consistently deliver on lead-safe operations across the city



Focus Area #1: Improve Operations

What happened with the voicemails was unacceptable. And this isn't the first time Cleveland residents have been let down on issues of lead-safe housing. I've been writing about the [connection between trust and lead](#) for years. We need to produce real, tangible results. And along the way we must rebuild trust with our residents in their belief about how we're tackling lead poisoning.

That is why one of my key focus areas moving forward in this job is improving our operations and public accountability. This could take a few forms, including improved coordination between departments and external partners, including sufficient staffing and support for lead work to move forward.

To start with, I recommend that the City of Cleveland hire a staff member to serve as a Lead Safe Ombudsperson. Hiring an Ombudsperson will create a structured, accountable channel for residents, landlords, and contractors to raise concerns about the lead-safe housing program. As the program has grown in complexity across multiple city departments and a private partnership with LSCC, we have lacked a single trusted point of contact for people who experience problems navigating it. Key staff members, including myself, have fulfilled parts of this role at different times. But we can do better by formalizing it and creating clear, consistent channels.

The model I recommend is private cases, public patterns. The ombudsperson would report directly to me as Senior Advisor for Lead Accountability, ensuring independence from the departments it reviews, and would report aggregate findings quarterly to the Lead Safe Advisory Board. The ombudsperson can also review and respond to inquiries from members of the Board.

This role also fills a genuine gap created by our auditor transition. Our prior CWRU-based auditor performed work that overlapped with ombuds functions — surfacing systemic concerns and elevating resident experience to program leadership. Our new auditor is focused on an important but different quality control project. Formalizing an ombudsperson office can be a critical part of rebuilding Clevelanders' trust in this city program.

Focus Area #2: Spend Money Responsibly and Quickly

Across the ecosystem, Cleveland is struggling to do efficient home repair. Lead-safe home repair has even more challenges because of the shortage of quality lead abatement contractors. Even the newer versions of these programs, like the improved HUD grant and full-abatement projects being done by the Lead-Safe Cleveland Coalition, are relatively small. Together, they may bring 100-150 units of fully abated rental housing online per year. To give you a sense of what we need to accomplish, we believe there are over 90,000 rentals in the city, most of which are pre-1978.



While we wait, more kids are poisoned in homes that haven't been touched by any of these programs.

My focus area as I head into the next phase of this job is to build policies and systems to spend dollars responsibly and quickly. We cannot re-create the same issues we've seen across the HUD grants. This will require piloting new methods and reporting to the public on the findings.

This is a particularly critical time because the pots of money for lead-safe home repair are dwindling. For the past few years, we have had four pots of money available for lead-safe home repairs: ODOD dollars at the city, HUD dollars at the city, incentive money at the coalition, and grant money at the coalition.

The ODOD dollars and the incentive money are both gone. We are winding down to the end of the HUD dollars, and new funding for these programs hasn't been posted yet. The private grant money at the coalition has a long waitlist. So right now, we don't have a clear path forward for lead-safe home repair money. Strategic thinking about this issue will be one of my key focus areas, particularly in alignment with broader questions over home repair.

Focus Area #3: *Expand Community Awareness*

My third area of focus is a long-term goal of expanding community awareness. In some ways, this work will build alongside our efforts to improve operations and build stronger home repair programming, since we need to be able to deliver on the commitments we make to our residents. But ensuring that my role maintains a clear community-focused lens is critical to our success. I will keep you and the public apprised of next steps as I better understand the ecosystem and staff capacity here at the City.

This work is just beginning as we define and solidify my role. With your approval, I will doggedly pursue these areas of work in the months ahead. I am also looking ahead to the legislative amendments that we are prepared to offer in the 2019 lead-safe law.

I'm grateful for your commitment to the city's kids, Mayor, along with the commitments of all the staff and partners who work on lead poisoning prevention. Our obligation is to create systems and accountability that match our desire to make a difference on this issue. That work won't be easy, and it won't be done overnight. But I hope that this 30-day report marks a step in the right direction.

