Sample Op-Ed

The Childhood Asthma Leadership Coalition (CALC) engages diverse stakeholders to advance policy proposals that improve childhood asthma management and symptom prevention. In January 2016, CALC submitted comments to Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Julian Castro commending HUD for its proposal requiring that all Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) implement a smoke-free housing policy.

CALC members understand that smoke-free public housing has the potential to help hundreds of thousands of low-income children from being exposed to the dangers of secondhand smoke in their homes. To that end, CALC strongly believes that HUD’s smoke-free policy should protect children where they play outdoors, and should include protection from all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes and water pipe tobacco (hookah).

CALC also believes that HUD should adopt a nationwide smoke-free policy that covers all multi-family housing under HUD’s control, including units in mixed-finance buildings.

Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month offers CALC members an opportunity to show their support for the implementation of a smoke-free housing policy while simultaneously asking for expanded protections for all children, especially those suffering from childhood asthma.

The following sample op-ed can be adapted and used by your organization. Op-eds should typically be no longer than 650 words and be submitted by a local organization and/or the spokesperson for that organization. The op-ed below is 563 word. Call your newspaper’s editorial department first to inquire about their op-ed submission guidelines, deadlines, and other relevant information. Let them know you plan to submit an op-ed as part of Asthma Awareness Month and thank them for their time. If you can further adapt this op-ed with a local example or story, we strongly suggest doing so.

The placeholders in this sample op-ed are in [BRACKETS]. Please replace this information accordingly. For further guidance or assistance, please contact Gabe Vasquez, Director of Media Relations at First Focus, gabev@firstfocus.org.

May is peak season for many spring trees, plants, and flowers. It’s also Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month and a good time to raise awareness about the connection between asthma and allergies. In fact, 6.3 million children in the U.S. are estimated to suffer from the disease.

While many natural-occurring environmental factors that aggravate asthma are tough to mitigate – tree, grass and weed pollens – there are many other factors that can be controlled. Things like dust mites, cockroach particles, animal dander, and one of the most pervasive irritants: exposure to secondhand smoke.

Unmanaged, childhood asthma poses a serious health risk, often requiring hospitalization. For many children who are often sick from the symptoms of asthma, that means lost school days for them and lost work days for many parents, significantly impacting their school performance and their family’s economic security.

For low-income children, the outcomes are even worse. Children from poor households are twice as likely as their more affluent classmates to be diagnosed with asthma. Many of these low-income children often live in housing administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In November 2015, HUD proposed a new rule that would direct all of its public housing agencies to become “smoke free.” If promulgated, the new rule would require places like [LOCAL HUD HOUSING EXAMPLE] to implement the new policy, which directs housing agencies to prohibit cigarettes, cigars, and pipes in all living units, indoor common areas, administrative offices and outdoor areas within 25 feet of housing and administrative offices.

It’s clear that secondhand tobacco smoke is a significant public health hazard, killing thousands annually and contributing to a wide range of diseases, including lung cancer, heart disease, lung disease, respiratory infections, and sudden infant death syndrome. And according to the U.S. Surgeon General, secondhand smoke is a major asthma trigger and one of the most significant contributors toward asthma prevalence and morbidity in children.

With e-cigarettes being one of the newest, and most widely used and available tobacco products on the market today, we also think HUD should include e-cigarettes and water pipe tobacco (hookah) its definition of tobacco products. Children exposed to e-cigarette aerosol can be exposed to a substantial amount of harmful chemicals, including fine and ultrafine particles that can be deposited in the deeper parts of the lung and may harm the respiratory system and increase the risk of asthma.

Anyone who’s stayed in hotel room where it’s clear that past guests have smoked tobacco, know the smell is pervasive and often irritating. For children with asthma, it can be even worse. Even where children live in a nonsmoking household, they are not safe from tobacco smoke exposure given the ease at which smoke can infiltrate other units in multifamily housing. Because public housing residents smoke at a rate almost twice as high as other residents, we think HUD should be clear that every multi-family housing unit should be 100 percent smoke free. No grandfathering, no exceptions.

It’s not yet clear what HUD’s final rules for its smoke-free housing directive will look like, but we think mindful [YOUR STATE RESIDENTS HERE] can begin to implement some of these same practices in their own homes. It’s estimated that [NUMBER OF STATE CHILDREN SUFFERING FROM ASTHMA] children are suffering from asthma in [YOUR STATE]. They and their lungs would sure appreciate it.

[ONE SENTENCE DESCRIPTION OF THE AUTHOR – YOUR SPOKESPERSON]