

## **Dr. Sarah Stelzner Statement for Press Conference on Landlord Tenant Issue**

**March 9, 2020**

My name is Dr. Sarah Stelzner and I am the co-chairperson of the legislative committee for the INAAP. I am a pediatrician in the International Marketplace in Indianapolis. I am here to talk about how housing insecurity and homelessness negatively impacts the health, safety, and education and development of children, and why it is important to stabilize families in housing.

Homeless and housing insecure children show higher rates of acute and chronic health problems than low-income children with homes. They have increased rates of multiple infectious, respiratory, gastrointestinal, and dermatologic diseases and otitis media, diarrhea, bronchitis, scabies, lice, and dental caries. Asthma is more frequent and more severe in this population. They also suffer from higher rates of accidents and injuries than low-income children with secure homes. Children without a stable home are more likely to skip meals, worry about the availability of food, and consume foods with low nutritional quality and high fat content. As a result, they suffer from high rates of malnutrition, stunting, and obesity.

Also, emotional distress, developmental delays, and decreased academic achievement are all more common in this population. Experiencing frequent moves interrupts their education and impacts school performance. In a study of elementary school students, these children scored lower on math and reading achievement tests than low-income students living in secure homes. Speech and language deficits lead to significantly decreased literacy rates in school-aged children.

Moreover, they are at an increased risk of abuse, exposure to violence, and psychological trauma.

The potential life-course effects of housing insecurity during early childhood are important. Housing insecurity influences parenting and child behavior. It impedes the development of role models, informal neighborhood social supports, connections to resources such as child care, family participation in the social environment, and establishment of a medical home for consistent health care. All of these social factors are important to families with young children. Neighborhoods where families know and trust each other and community-level interventions that ensure adequate, safe, and affordable housing can positively affect the physical and mental health of parents and children.

Although all socioeconomic groups are affected by housing insecurity, low-income households are particularly at risk because of their already constrained financial resources and lack of reserve funds. Governmental action and community investment in stabilizing families in housing they can afford can alleviate housing insecurity. Protecting families with young children from being forced into frequent moves should be a policy priority of governmental action to decrease all of these long-term health and developmental impacts of toxic stress on children.