

ALLIANCE FOR HEALTHY HOMES

Working for Affordable Healthy Housing for All



August 19, 2008

Governor David A. Paterson
Executive Chamber, Second Floor
New York State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

**Re: The Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention and Safe Housing Act of 2008
Gantt-Robach (A.6399-C / S.6350-B)**

Dear Governor Paterson:

The Alliance for Healthy Homes urges you to sign into law the *Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention and Safe Housing Act of 2008*.

A national, non-profit public interest organization, the Alliance has been working since 1990 to eliminate childhood lead poisoning and other health hazards from housing. Our staff has traveled the country and observed the impact of state and federal laws related to lead on the well being of our children. Despite being a state with one of the highest numbers of lead poisoned children, New York's law is amongst the weakest in the country. The *Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention and Safe Housing Act of 2008* would go a long way towards solving New York's lead problems.

Each year some 5,000 children are newly identified as lead poisoned in New York State, about half outside of New York City. In actuality, many more children are poisoned each year but undetected since not all eligible children are screened for lead in their blood as required under law. Current New York State law requires local health departments to look for the source of lead only *after a child has been identified as lead poisoned through a blood test*. This policy essentially uses children as biological detectors of poor-quality housing.

Although lead has been found to be toxic to nearly every organ in the body, its effect on a child's developing nervous system is particularly egregious. Children exposed to lead in infancy suffer permanent brain damage, proven to lower their IQ scores, and likely cause behavioral and learning problems. This damage is believed to be both irreversible and permanent. Exposing New York children to lead is thus increasing the financial burden of the State's school system to provide special education and resulting in adults who are likely to earn less money and pay fewer taxes. **Thus preventing lead exposure is not only a moral imperative – it is also an economic one.**

The Gantt-Robach (A.6399-C) legislation will require the state to develop childhood lead poisoning prevention plans for the top 30 "hot spots" for lead, identify the sources of lead in these communities and require removal of lead hazards before children are poisoned. The bill would also improve children's lead screening and reporting and provide modest tax credits to assist low-income property owners in capital improvements to eliminate lead hazards. And most important during a time of difficult budget cuts – **there are no unfunded local mandates and any new state obligations are dependent upon funding being made available.**

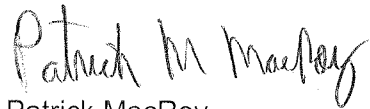
Since New York began regularly testing young children for lead in the blood in the early 1990s, more than 200,000 children in the state have been identified as being lead poisoned. The vast majority of the children who have been poisoned outside of New York City live in "pockets" of lead

poisoning located in just a few cities (Buffalo, Rochester, Albany, Newburgh, Yonkers, Syracuse, and Utica).

The Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention and Safe Housing Act targets the solution to the problem and provides limited tax credits to give property owners the help they need to make their housing safe. When fully implemented, this legislation will prevent tens of thousands of New York's most vulnerable children from the life-long damage caused by lead poisoning.

PLEASE SIGN Gantt-Robach (A.6399-C/S.6350-B) – *the Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention and Safe Housing Act* of 2008 – into law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick M MacRoy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P".

Patrick MacRoy
Executive Director