

Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning

a partner of the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency

1150 University Ave • Rochester, NY 14607 • (585) 256-2267 • www.leadSAFEby2010.org

August 18, 2008

Terryl Brown Clemons, Esq
Acting Counsel to the Governor
New York State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224
Email: Legislative.Secretary@chamber.state.ny.us

**Let's
MAKE
LEAD
HISTORY**

As requested, I am supplying you with my analysis and recommendations regarding the **Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention and Safe Housing Act (S.6350/A.6399)**. This is pivotal legislation to help end childhood lead poisoning in New York State and I strongly recommend that the Governor support this bill.

This innovative and courageous bill identifies lead hazards in homes and provides the economic incentive of a tax credit for property owners to make their dwellings lead safe. The impact of this bill will prevent thousands of our children every year from becoming permanently brain damaged by lead poisoning. What a legacy the State Senate, State Assembly, and Governor David Paterson, after he signs the bill, are leaving for the children of New York!

Lead poisoning causes irreversible brain damage and there is no cure. At very low levels of exposure in children, lead causes reduced IQ and attention span, hyperactivity, impaired growth, hearing loss, insomnia, and a range of other health, intellectual, and behavioral problems. The cost of implementing the law is minimal compared to the long term cost of not signing it.

When we're doing community outreach as part of our educational efforts at the Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning we tell concerned parents "you pay for lead poisoning now, or you pay for it later, but you (society) will pay the price for lead". While that statement may be a cliché, it is also a fact—childhood lead poisoning takes its toll on society, families, and governments. Ignoring this modern epidemic is not only expensive, but it is immoral. This is especially true because this trauma is preventable.

"I am well aware of the damage done and cost to society of lead ingestion by children. The repercussions the cost of childhood lead poisoning can be measured in the educational and criminal justice systems, and by the deterioration of relationships within the family."

– Dr. Walter Cooper, New York State Regent Emeritus

Lead poisoning can make a child aggressive; causes reading and learning disabilities; and is strongly related to the child's future productivity and expected earnings. When lead poisoned children enter school, many are diagnosed with ADHD or other learning disabilities and placed in Special Education.

So what are the dollars and cents cost of childhood lead poisoning? In the Rochester City School District the cost of educating one general student per year in 2001-2002 was \$6,091—for a Special Education student, the cost was **three times** that at \$17,997 (*New York State Education Department*).

Population numbers in the city are declining with crime statistics, deteriorating neighborhoods, and the state of city schools among the reasons cited for this change. Ending lead poisoning would reduce crime, increase school performance, and create more appealing neighborhoods. Recent research on lead's effects at low levels suggests measurable societal benefits from preventing even low-level lead exposure in childhood and underscores the importance of making this public health goal a priority to improve the quality of life across the community.

Conversations about money invariably dwell on the expenditure side of the ledger. However, the passage of the **Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention and Safe Housing Act (S.6350/A.6399)** presents an opportunity to recast lead-safety interventions as investments rather than expenditures. These are investments that at the same time will

1. lower health care needs and costs for children,
2. mitigate long-term health care problems and costs (primary costs of the individual as well as related increases in insurance premiums) associated with adults who were poisoned as children and now suffering from osteoporosis, kidney damage, and hypertension;
3. improve school performance;
4. reduce delinquent behavior;
5. upgrade affordable housing;
6. stabilize distressed neighborhoods.

On-going efforts must speak to the relationship between lead poisoning and the behavior disorders that interfere with learning as well as the cost to taxpayers of services for a lead poisoned child vs. the cost of making housing safe. Compared to the cost of treatment for multiple problems associated with lead poisoning, the costs of lead hazard controls are reasonable, effective, and permanent.

When New York State becomes the first in the nation to have virtually no children poisoned using thoughtful and cost-effective policies, it will remove one of the largest barriers to lead safety regulation nationwide—the sense that the problem is too large to solve.

Sincerely,



Joseph Hill
CPLP Communications Director