

October 10, 2008

The Honorable David Paterson  
Governor, State of New York  
State Capitol  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Paterson,

I urge you to approve the Gnatt-Robach (A.6399-C/S.6350.8) Child Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention and Safe Housing Act, which I understand is now before you for action.

Approval of this bill is critically important for New York State and especially for the children in most impoverished sections of its urban areas. Moreover, this legislation finally puts New York State on par with the rest of the nation, as it is the only northeast state – and only one of a handful of states altogether – which does not currently have comprehensive certification legislation.

Other important benefits of this bill – which passed unanimously in the state senate and overwhelmingly in the state assembly – are:

1. It makes New York State eligible for Federal funding from which it has been categorically excluded
  - EPA funds of approximately \$2 million for implementation of the state regulatory program;
  - HUD funds of up to \$5 million annually for lead hazard control;
2. It creates a statewide lead poisoning prevention plan that will use existing state data to identify the communities and neighborhoods at highest risk, thus enabling the state to work with local building and health officials to prepare efficient and responsive local plans;
3. It reduces the numbers of and costs for students in special education, as well as healthcare and criminal justice costs;
4. It likely will lower the rates of violent crimes, and even the rates of repeated teen pregnancies, by protecting young children from the types of permanent

damage to their “risk assessment” mechanisms that many believe prevent them as teens from moderating their behaviors;

5. It will pick up where the current lead pilot program (which expires in September 2009) left off and makes use of what was learned from it, rather than waste the over \$8 million already spent, because the state either will have to abandon its recent efforts or pass the costs on to the participating municipalities as an unfunded mandate.
6. It saves future special education costs of approximately \$2.5 million/year versus a cost of less than \$13 million in tax revenue over the next three years.

This legislation is especially needed in our region. In 2005, the state Department of Health identified 363 children poisoned by lead in Buffalo alone – and those are only the cases that were actually identified. The total number is likely to be hundreds more. Nearly 300 of those cases were in only seven zip codes – these “high risk” neighborhoods are home to 90% of the African American children under age five in the city.

Buffalo’s lead poisoning rate is arguably the worst in the country. It is twice the New York State average, which itself is twice the Federal average, making children in Buffalo 400% more likely to be brain damaged than the national average. This law will allow Buffalo, like New York City and Rochester, to adopt a plan to allow building officials to look for lead paint hazards when they do routine inspections of properties.

In sum, approval of this bill will go a long way to prevent New York State cities’ most vulnerable population – its children – from becoming damaged for life from lead poisoning. I hope you agree.

Sincerely yours,

Andrew J. Rudnick

/jev

Cc: Charles O’Byrne  
Dennis Whalen  
Mayor Byron Brown