



January 31, 2021

**Founders**

Vernice Miller-Travis  
Peggy M. Shepard  
Chuck Sutton

**Board of Directors**

**Chair**

Jeff Jones

**Secretary**

Sarangji Iyengar

**Treasurer**

Ken P. Mak

**Members**

Gregory Anderson  
Peter Bokor  
Dennis Derryck, Ph.D.  
David Evans, Ph.D.  
Abiola Fasehun  
Eric A. Goldstein, Esq.  
Jeff Jones  
Vernice Miller-Travis  
Phillip Morrow  
Dart Westphal

**Executive Director**

Peggy M. Shepard

**Sonal Jessel**

Director of Policy  
*WE ACT for Environmental Justice*  
1854 Amsterdam Ave, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
New York NY, 10031  
646-983-0224

**RE: Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Housing  
Written Testimony**

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding New York State budget on housing. My name is Sonal Jessel, and I'm the Director of Policy at WE ACT for Environmental Justice. Over the past 33 years, WE ACT has been combating environmental racism in Northern Manhattan. I have received my Master of Public Health from Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. WE ACT has been involved in lead advocacy since the 1990s, notably as a prominent organization fighting for the passage of New York City's Local Law 1 in 2004.

Today, I am here as a leader of the Lead Free Kids New York Coalition, a collection of experts and advocates committed to preventing and eradicating lead poisoning in New York State. **We are asking for New York State to commit \$1 billion to fund sweeping lead poisoning prevention efforts. In particular, we are asking for a budget allocation of \$500 million through housing.**

Lead poisoning leads to severe behavioral and developmental issues, and there is NO safe level of lead. The American Academy of Pediatrics says "low-level lead exposure, even at blood lead concentrations below 5 µg/dL (50 ppb), is a causal risk factor for diminished intellectual and academic abilities, higher rates of neurobehavioral disorders such as hyperactivity and attention deficits, and lower birth weight in children. No effective treatments ameliorate the permanent developmental effects of lead toxicity."<sup>1</sup>

Childhood lead poisoning disproportionately impacts children of color across the State. Black/African American, Latino, and Asian children have the highest rates of childhood lead poisoning in New York City, New York State, and Countrywide. In 2020, the elevated blood lead level rate among children associated with private housing was 11.3 per 1,000 children tested, according to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Particularly, it is Black/African American children with the highest levels. The disparate exposure is due to the fact that it is low income communities of color that due to a lack of adequate resources and support, live in old buildings that have not received adequate lead remediation.

<sup>1</sup> <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/138/1/e20161493/52600/Prevention-of-Childhood-Lead-Toxicity>



According to Columbia University, there are about 5.3 million housing units in New York State that contain possible lead-based paint hazards. New York State has thousands of children with elevated blood lead levels. This is because New York State has the oldest housing stock in the Country. For decades, our State's decision-makers have been sitting on a lead poisoning crisis without any action. It is time we secure a vibrant future for children by preventing childhood lead poisoning.

To do this, we are asking for \$500 million from housing this year, administered through Homes and Community Renewal (HCR). We are asking for about \$50 million of that expense be put aside for HCR's administrative needs to address lead hazards. The other \$450 million must go to programs to directly assist low- and middle-income property owners and landlords across the State to remediate lead hazards in their properties.

The Lead Free Kids Coalition suggests that the funds be implemented through community development financial institutions (CDFI) funds, to allow for other financial sources such as the Federal Government, private and philanthropic to contribute to a pool of funds that can grow over time.

Considering inflation with increased labor costs and supply chain concerns, we estimate the average cost to make a housing unit free of lead hazards is about \$30,000. This means with \$450 million in funding, we fund 15,000 lead free units across the State. We know that much of the source of lead exposure happens from housing units that are repeat offenders. Families rotate through these homes, picking up lead exposures with no end in sight. Making these homes lead-free means that every family that occupies that home from there on out are safe from lead exposure. Knowing there are 5.3 million housing units that may have lead hazards, this is just one step forward to solve a **major** crisis.

The Lead Free Kids NY Coalition thanks you for your time.

