



**Testimony before the Health Committees of the New York State Senate and Assembly
Regarding the Governor’s Proposed FY 2026-27 Budget**

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Governor Hochul’s draft proposed budget for fiscal year 2026-27. My name is Gabrielle Gonzales and I’m the Environmental Justice and Health Project Manager at Clean+Healthy, which has a mission of building a just and healthy world where toxic chemicals are simply unthinkable. We also have the privilege of co-leading with WE ACT for Environmental Justice, the Lead Free Kids NY coalition, is a growing statewide coalition of individuals, groups and organizations working together to end childhood lead exposure and poisoning in New York by advocating for state-level policy solutions to eliminate lead hazards in housing and other community settings.

Background

In 1978, the use of lead-based household paints was banned in the United States.¹ New York City led the way with a ban on the use of lead-based paint in residential buildings in 1960² and New York State in 1970.³

Communities of color are among the highest groups with elevated blood lead levels (EBLLs), which are levels above 5 micrograms per deciliter.⁴ Upstate communities are facing incredibly high rates of EBLLs. Buffalo, for example, has one of the most decrepit housing stock in the United States due to segregation, disinvestment, and depopulation. In 2016, about 40% of the tested children in Buffalo had EBLL.⁵ Other communities such as Syracuse are seeing one in five children with elevated blood lead levels.⁶

¹ <https://www.epa.gov/lead/protect-your-family-sources-lead>

² <https://council.nyc.gov/data/lead-in-nyc-homes/>

³

<https://www.environmentaleducation.com/documents/Lead%20Resources/NYS%20Regulations%20Summary%2011%2030%2023.pdf>

⁴ [DOI: 10.1097/PHH.0000000000000891](https://doi.org/10.1097/PHH.0000000000000891)

⁵ <https://www.dw.com/en/lead-poisoning-reveals-environmental-racism-in-the-us/a-53335395>

⁶ <https://www.nrdc.org/press-releases/syracuse-lead-levels-among-highest-detected-drinking-water-decades-higher-flint-and>

Long-term health impacts of lead exposure for children can include damage to the brain and nervous system, behavioral and learning problems, stunted growth and development, and difficulties with hearing and speech. Results of lead poisoning as an adult can present itself as fatigue, irritability, troubles concentrating, seizures, anemia, hypertension, nausea, miscarriages or stillbirths, and reduced sperm count and motility.⁷ More than 90% of the total body burden of lead is stored and accumulated in the bones, which becomes problematic when the bone's metabolism increases during pregnancy and postmenopausal osteoporosis. During pregnancy and lactation, the body's calcium homeostasis is significantly altered.⁸ The high calcium demand during pregnancy results in intestinal calcium reabsorption and bone turnover increases. Once postmenopausal osteoporosis starts, the bones start to naturally break down and lead is released into the blood and re-exposes the organ systems in adults. Other factors such as malnutrition, physiological stress and illness, advanced age, hyperthyroidism, kidney disease, and calcium deficiency all force the body to reintroduce the lead back into the bloodstream.⁹ Lead is also stored in the soft tissue of the body, primarily in the liver.¹⁰

Recently, more than ever, there has been an emphasis on *affordability*. **New York can not afford to have lead poisoned children anymore.** The burdens of a lead poisoned child are extremely costly to a caregiver, themselves, and the community around them. An estimated \$893M is lost in lifetime earnings attributed to one lead poisoned child in New York State¹¹. This is based off of:

- the loss of IQ points,
- inability to perform at the same level as their peers, and
- hardships associated with the effects of lead on the body.

Parents also have to support their child's need for potential medical intervention, face loss of work, in and out of school services, and other scaffolding that they put in place to help their child thrive. The lead poisoned individual is also unable to reach their full potential and be as active of a member in their community, which in return affects their community as a whole. The societal costs are also seen in:

- loss of taxes from the lead poisoned individual due to lower wage jobs being held by those individuals,
- more health services needed for the individual, and
- additional educational services that their district will have to provide in order to support them.

It is important that we set each of our community members up for success so that we can all thrive as a whole.

⁷ <https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/2584.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4266784/pdf/JFRH-8-135.pdf>

⁹ <https://smrj.scholasticahq.com/article/35880-association-between-covid-19-severity-and-residing-in-high-lead-level-locations>

¹⁰ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0976288418300638>

¹¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1koVxUE3smWFaz8OyggUwtZl9uPBr0vDP/view>

There has also been an emphasis on new development so that we can support the growing population across the State. As there is new development, we need to remember about the older housing in the state that may be in need of upgrades. Many communities have housing that is not conducive to healthy living due to lead exposure where paint is peeling. Some cities are majority rentals and see families rotate in and out frequently, leaving regular wear and tear on homes. If these homes contain lead paint, that wear and tear becomes dangerous, producing lead dust and chipped paint that can be easily ingested. **We have to remediate with lead-safe work practices and focus on our older homes that still contain leaded paint.**

In 2023, PHL1377 “The Rental Registry” was enacted through the FY 23-24 budget. Regulations for this law have continued to be a work in progress. The intention of the registry is to test rental units in the top 25 communities of concern, outside of New York City, and to create a public facing registry of where lead paint is or is not present, address lead hazards, and either determine if a unit needs testing every three years or can be certified as lead safe. There was approximately \$18.5M dedicated to this program in the Governor’s budget under State Operations and Aid to Localities. **We ask that it be raised to \$20M** and that the reappropriations get pulled down so that the municipalities are able to buy the required equipment, staff themselves properly, and have the necessary resources to do thorough outreach and education in their communities.

From information gathered from the Rental Registry, we are expecting that there will be an uptick in repairs needed in units so that they are able to pass inspections. These necessary repairs will result in contractors directly disturbing lead-based paint; in order to prevent these workers or the residents of the units from being exposed to lead dust, we need an emphasis on lead-safe work practices. The Renovation, Repair, and Painting Program (RRP) is overseen by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 2. This region includes New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and eight Indian Nations.¹² It is nearly impossible for the EPA to properly oversee this program with the continued staffing cuts and be able to ensure compliance. The Lead-Free Kids New York Coalition urges you to consider working with EPA Region 2 to co-enforce or fully adopt the RRP program in New York State. **We see this working best if the internal infrastructure of the program is built out in conjunction with the asbestos program that is nested within the Department of Labor (DOL).**

New York State taking over the RRP rule would be financially beneficial to the state. The advantageous aspect of adopting the program is the opportunity for the State to tailor the rollout and execution of the program to the needs of New York. We feel it would be best for New York State to administer the RRP program alongside the asbestos program that has been successfully across the state since 2007¹³. It would allow the new program to utilize the already existing infrastructure and industry relationships. It would also increase the revenue for that department so they could both grow and contribute to New York State’s economy. Many lead

¹² <https://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/epa-region-2>

¹³ <https://dol.ny.gov/code-rule-56-asbestos-related-information>

programs in other states such as Delaware, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin are revenue generating, so there is no doubt in our mind that it would be revenue generating for New York State. Potential collaboration with the EPA could also allow for some outside funding for initial buildout of the program. It would alleviate the burden on the EPA and allow for better oversight altogether.

We also ask that you include the Healthy Neighborhoods Program (HNP) back into your budget. This \$1.45M per year program was able to provide direct outreach, education, and oversight¹⁴ to tens of thousands of low-income families in New York State over the past 40 years¹⁵ in 18 counties¹⁶. The HNP was able to visit 28,491 homes between 2008 and 2012 that were built before 1950.¹⁷ The goal of these visits was to visually assess homes and identify potential environmental health and safety hazards to implement interventions. These home visits show a significant return in investment. Each in-home asthma visit costs \$300 but the savings in Medicaid Managed Care is \$1,083 because of less doctor, ER and hospital visits, and less immediate response medications.¹⁸ Overall, this and other lead poisoning prevention programs are beneficial to public health, the State, and families.

Budget and Legislative Recommendations

Lead Free Kids NY recommends the following within the 2025-26 Budget:

- Lead Poisoning Prevention Programming Funding:
 - \$40M for the county health department lead programs in the Aid to Localities budget
 - \$20M to implement Public Health Law 1377: the New York State Rental Registry and Proactive Inspection Program in the Aid to Localities and State Operations budget
 - \$20M+ for the lead abatement program in the Capital Projects and State Operations budget
 - \$4M for NYSHECK in the Capital Projects budget (Environmental Protection Fund)
 - \$1.4M for the Healthy Neighborhood Program
- Clean Water and Infrastructure Funding:
 - \$500 million for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act, with at least \$100 million of that funding to be dedicated specifically to lead pipe replacement
- Renovation, Repair, and Painting Act:
 - Create internal infrastructure for a productive Renovation, Repair, and Painting Program to be administered by the Department of Labor
- Energy Retrofitting and Green Renovations, Including Lead Remediation:

¹⁴ https://journals.lww.com/jphmp/abstract/2017/03000/an_evaluation_of_a_state_funded_healthy_homes.23.aspx

¹⁵ <https://nchh.org/2026/02/new-york-states-proposed-budget-eliminates-the-healthy-neighborhoods-program/>

¹⁶ https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/indoors/healthy_neighborhoods/

¹⁷ https://journals.lww.com/jphmp/abstract/2017/03000/the_new_york_state_healthy_neighborhoods_program_22.aspx

¹⁸ https://journals.lww.com/jphmp/abstract/2017/03000/a_cost_benefit_analysis_of_a_state_funded_healthy.24.aspx

- Include the Green Affordable Pre-Electrification Fund bill language in the Transportation, Economic Development and Environmental Conservation Article VII bill
- \$200M for the GAP Fund for NYSERDA in the Capital Projects budget

Legislative Recommendations

Lead Pipes Replacement Act *S. 6892 (Rivera) / A. 7878 (Paulin)*

Under the bill, water utilities must offer a free lead pipe replacement at no direct cost to customers, saving many economically-struggling New Yorkers unlucky enough to have a lead pipe upwards of \$10,000. It also creates a process to replace lead service lines if encountering non-responsiveness or non-compliance by a customer. In a win for environmental justice, this bill requires water systems to prioritize lead service line replacements in disadvantaged communities and other vulnerable populations. Additionally, there's a commonsense provision providing a free lead filter to any customer with a verified lead service line, who requests one, while waiting to have the work done.

Find Lead Pipes Faster Act *(S.3581 Rivera / A.2181 Paulin)*

The purpose of this bill is to ensure that property owners or occupants of the property (i.e., renters) respond to a request by the water utility to provide access for a quick and free water service line inspection for the purpose of completing their lead service line inventories. Under this bill, a legal loophole will be closed, creating a process by which the water utility can take action to gain consent when there's failure to respond by the property owner or occupants.

Renovation, Repair, and Painting Act *(S.6228 Bailey / A.2749 Bronson)*

This bill would have New York State take responsibility for enforcing and enacting the EPA's RRP program, which requires that projects that disturb lead-based paint in homes, child care facilities and preschools built before 1978 be performed by lead-safe certified contractors.

Early Intervention Services *(S.5538 Baskin / A.6537 McMahon)*

Under this bill, children diagnosed with an elevated blood lead level (at or above 5mcg/dL) automatically would become eligible for Early Intervention services in New York State.

Lead Paint Right to Know *(S.4265 Kavanagh / A.1529 Rivera)*

This act will complement existing state and local laws on lead poisoning prevention. Section 1377 of the public health law, enacted in 2023, requires DOH to develop a registry of all rental residential dwellings with two or more units built before 1980 within communities of concern outside of NYC, and require they be inspected for lead hazards at least every 3 years. The Lead Paint Right to Know Act will require lead inspection reports that must be shared with buyers of residential dwellings and subsequently included in the new DOH registry.