



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

By Gabrielle Gonzales  
Environmental Justice and Health Project Manager at Clean+Healthy  
Coordinator of Lead Free Kids NY

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, which 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 sale and use of lead-based paints in residential properties was banned in the United States.<sup>1</sup> New York City led the way with a ban on the sale and use of lead-based paint in residential buildings in 1960<sup>2</sup> and New York State in 1970<sup>3</sup>. Now, we are seeing these leaded homes poisoning residents, especially children, across the state.

Communities of color are among the highest demographics that are being found with elevated blood lead levels (EBLLs), which in New York State are levels above 5 micrograms per deciliter.<sup>4</sup> The CDC has lowered the reference level to 3.5 micrograms per deciliter<sup>5</sup>, but New York has not made this adjustment because our health department has concerns around adding a new population of children to the department's caseload. Upstate communities are facing incredibly high rates of EBLLs. Buffalo, for example, has one of the most decrepit housing stock

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

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

<sup>3</sup>

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

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

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/lead-prevention/php/news-features/updates-blood-lead-reference-value.html>

in the United States due to segregation, disinvestment, and depopulation. In 2016, about 40% of the tested children in Buffalo had EBLL.<sup>6</sup> Other communities such as Syracuse are seeing one in five children having elevated blood lead levels.<sup>7</sup>

We have been aware that lead is harmful for the body, since as early as 2000 BC.<sup>8</sup> The burden of lead poisoning in the workplace has consistently been placed on the working class. In the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, the worst outbreaks of lead poisoning seen in adult populations were due to occupational hazards. Women that worked in the cottage ceramic industry had unwell children. Men in smelters were getting sick. Over time we realized that laws and protections in the workplace were necessary to protect public health. Looking to today, we are still facing an issue with workplace exposures to lead.

In 2023, PHL1377 “The Rental Registry and Proactive Inspection Program” was incorporated into the budget as an Article VII policy bill. We see a lot of potential for benefit in the communities it will cover. The intention of the registry is to ensure that multi-dwelling rental housing in top 25 most lead-impacted communities outside of New York City are free of lead paint hazards, and to provide a public registry so that members of the public can determine the lead hazard status of these units. Roughly \$18.5M dedicated to this program in the Governor’s FY 26-27 budget under State Operations and Aid to Localities. We ask that it be raised to \$20M and that the reappropriations get spent 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.

Due to the Rental Registry and Proactive Inspection Program, we are expecting that there will be an uptick in remediation needed in units, so that they can be certified as free of lead paint hazards. These necessary repairs will result in contractors directly disturbing lead-based paint; in order to ensure that workers and residents are not exposed to lead during remediation, NY needs to prioritize enforcement of lead-safe work practice requirements. The Renovation, Repair, and Painting Program (RRP) is currently 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.<sup>9</sup> It is extremely difficult for the EPA to properly oversee this program with their current limited staff and resources and be in all the places they need to be to ensure compliance. **The Coalition urges the State to take the necessary steps to to co-enforce or fully adopt enforcement of the RRP program in New York State. We recommend that for the success of this program, the internal infrastructure of the program is built out in conjunction with the asbestos program that is nested within the Department of Labor (DOL).**

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/lead-poisoning-reveals-environmental-racism-in-the-us/a-53335395>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nrdc.org/press-releases/syracuse-lead-levels-among-highest-detected-drinking-water-decades-higher-flint-and>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/get\\_the\\_lead\\_out/pdfs/health/Needleman\\_1999.pdf](https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/get_the_lead_out/pdfs/health/Needleman_1999.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/epa-region-2>

We also ask that the NYS Assembly and Senate **restore funding for the Healthy Neighborhoods Program (HNP) in the one-house budgets. This \$1.45M per year program saves health care costs well above the cost of the program.** HNP provides direct outreach, education, and oversight<sup>10</sup> to tens of thousands of low-income families in New York State, and has done so over the past 40 years<sup>11</sup> in 18 counties<sup>12</sup>. The HNP visited 28,491 homes between 2008 and 2012 that were built before 1950.<sup>13</sup> 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 fewer doctor, ER and hospital visits, and less immediate response medications.*<sup>14</sup> Overall, this and other lead poisoning prevention programs are beneficial to public health, the State, and families.

Housing affordability has become a focal point for New Yorkers across the state not only for those seeking housing a new home, but for those living in homes under poor and sometimes dangerous conditions due to lead exposure. This is an important priority. However, a focus on creating affordable housing for New Yorkers should not exclude ensuring current low-cost housing is safe and healthy. After all, treating a child that has been severely lead poisoned is also expensive, and the lifelong costs of lead poisoning are profound, all harming the ability to live affordably. Addressing the legacy of lead paint sits squarely at the intersection of affordable housing, the ability to earn enough to live on, and affordable health care. Adopting these recommendations contributes to an affordable New York State.

## **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:

<sup>10</sup> [https://journals.lww.com/jphmp/abstract/2017/03000/an\\_evaluation\\_of\\_a\\_state\\_funded\\_healthy\\_homes.23.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/jphmp/abstract/2017/03000/an_evaluation_of_a_state_funded_healthy_homes.23.aspx)

<sup>11</sup> <https://nchh.org/2026/02/new-york-states-proposed-budget-eliminates-the-healthy-neighborhoods-program/>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/indoors/healthy\\_neighborhoods/](https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/indoors/healthy_neighborhoods/)

<sup>13</sup> [https://journals.lww.com/jphmp/abstract/2017/03000/the\\_new\\_york\\_state\\_healthy\\_neighborhoods\\_program\\_22.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/jphmp/abstract/2017/03000/the_new_york_state_healthy_neighborhoods_program_22.aspx)

<sup>14</sup> [https://journals.lww.com/jphmp/abstract/2017/03000/a\\_cost\\_benefit\\_analysis\\_of\\_a\\_state\\_funded\\_healthy.24.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/jphmp/abstract/2017/03000/a_cost_benefit_analysis_of_a_state_funded_healthy.24.aspx)

- \$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:](#)
  - Include a Renovation, Repair, and Paint Act akin to *S. 6228 (Bailey) / A. 2749 (Bronson)* to be administered by the Department of Labor in the one-house Article VII budget bills
- Energy Retrofitting and Green Renovations, Including Lead Remediation:
  - Include the Green Affordable Pre-Electrification Fund bill language (as described below) 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.