

TESTIMONY

NJ Senate and Budget Appropriations Committee

April 25, 2023

Contact: Shereyl Snider

Dear Committee Chair Sarlo and Vice-Chairperson Cunningham,

My name is Shereyl Snider, I'm a Trenton Resident, Community Organizer for the East Trenton Collaborative which is one of three community hubs as part of the Lead-Free NJ collaborative, member of the Jersey Water Works Lead in Drinking Water Taskforce and a steering committee member of the Clean Water, Healthy Families, Good Jobs campaign.

Lead is a toxin that can affect multiple body systems. Once it gets in the body, lead is absorbed in the bloodstream from the lungs-when breathed-in, or GI tract when ingested, and deposited in organs like brain, liver, kidney, bones and teeth where it can accumulate over time. Lead can stay in the body for years after exposure, and is particularly harmful to children. Their smaller bodies can absorb 4 to 5 times as much ingested lead as adults from any given source.

It is imperative that children six and under be screened for possible lead exposure, and have blood lead levels tested as early as possible between 6 months and 24 months since this is the period of a child's most rapid brain growth and when babies start crawling and putting things in their mouth. **There is not enough being done by the state to address lead hazards.** In the state's urban cities, like Trenton where I live and work, the city is plagued by poor housing and neglected water infrastructure. Between July 2020 to June 2021, among the five large municipalities with the highest percent of children under 6 years of age with an elevated blood lead level at or above 5 micrograms of lead per deciliter **Trenton (6.4%), ranks the highest** with other cities like East Orange (5.3%), Irvington (5.2%), Plainfield (4%) and Paterson (3.6%)¹ not far behind and this number is still expected to rise.

Lennie Martin, a Trenton resident shared that while his son stayed with his relatives, he was exposed to lead. Lennie said “When my son came back home from a long family vacation for a couple of months with his mother’s family I noticed something was off with my son. He was in the 3rd grade around the age of 8 or 9. My son was no longer able to pay attention or focus. His

¹NJ Health Department Lead Report Shows Increase in Screenings in Children Following COVID-19 Disruptions <https://www.nj.gov/health/news/2023/approved/20230412b.shtml>

speech was now impaired. He wasn't doing his homework, so now I start to discipline him because I'm thinking he just doesn't want to do it.

"It got frustrating for me and I stayed-up a lot of nights with him doing homework and he would just sit there looking and staring at it for hours. He was left back twice, in 3rd grade and in 4th grade. I got my child tested and they told me that my son had been poisoned by lead. I hurried to call and tell his mother and she said she already knew he had EBLI because he was tested while in her custody but with that information it did not prompt anyone to act, nor did they tell me" said Lennie Martin

Last year, members of the Lead-Free NJ collaborative requested that the State of New Jersey allocate \$600 million from its American Rescue Plan funds to remediate lead in homes, replace lead service lines, and educate residents like Lennie Martin.

While members applaud the legislature for awarding \$170 million in ARP Funds for lead paint remediation, there is still a need for additional funding for lead service line (LSL) replacement, with priority for low-income communities with a large number of LSLs.

An additional \$700 million will mean a full investment of \$1 billion will create over 13,000 well-paying jobs and spur an additional \$2.9 billion in economic benefit, while helping to maintain affordable water and sewer rates for New Jersey families. With remaining federal funding from the American Rescue Plan, New Jersey has a once in a generation opportunity to transform our water systems to ensure all New Jersey residents have access to clean water. Investing in water infrastructure today will yield continuing health and economic benefits for generations to come.

This is an important request that demands your support and action to prevent exposure for many New Jersey families so that our **children are free from lead poisoning and that our environment is lead-safe.** Thank you for your consideration

Shereyl Snider