Testimony in Support of House Bill 5403  
An Act Creating a Task Force to Study Lead Abatement  

Committee on Banking  
March 6, 2018

Senator Martin, Senator Winfield, Representative Lesser and distinguished members of the Banking Committee:

My name is Alice Rosenthal and I am a staff attorney at the Center for Children’s Advocacy, a public-interest law firm representing Connecticut’s most at-risk youth. I coordinate our Medical-Legal Partnership Project (“MLPP”) with Yale New Haven Children’s Hospital where I work in collaboration with medical providers to address legal issues impacting children’s health, such as education, benefits and poor housing conditions. Through my work on the MLPP, I often work with children who have lead poisoning. I have witnessed firsthand the detrimental impact of lead poisoning on children’s health.

We submit this testimony today in support of House Bill 5403. The time has come to take a closer look at Connecticut’s statutes and guidelines around lead prevention, intervention and abatement. Although we have made progress, recent studies and changes in federal guidance suggest it is time for Connecticut to reform our lead prevention and abatement statutes and programs.

Until 2012, the recommended blood level of concern was 10 ug/dL.\(^1\) The CDC now uses a reference level of 5 ug/dL, due in part to a 2003 study in the New England Journal of Medicine. The study found that, “of primary importance is that children's intellectual functioning at three and five years of age is inversely associated with blood lead concentrations, even when their peak concentrations remain below the CDC and WHO level of concern.”\(^2\) Even more recently, an August 2016 National Bureau of Economic Research paper brought even the 5 micrograms threshold into question. The researchers found a one unit (microgram) increase in mean blood lead is associated with a 3.1% increase in the probability of being “substantially below

\(^1\) What Do Parents Need to Know to Protect Their Children? Center for Disease Control, https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/acclpp/blood_lead_levels.htm

proficient” in reading and 2.1% increase of being “substantially below proficient” in math. Even levels below 5 micrograms per deciliter can have harmful effects on child development.

Studies conducted in Connecticut have reinforced these findings, finding that early childhood lead exposure negatively impacted Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) scores in reading and math. These effects are especially pronounced at low levels. Research has shown that the largest detriment to educational outcomes from lead can occur at the lowest levels of exposure if the child is at an early stage of development. Effects of lead poisoning do not increase proportional to blood lead level; the greatest damage occurs at low levels of exposure. As an August 2017 PEW Report reinforced, there are no safe levels of lead poisoning for children. Primary prevention

Our current system provides supports to families after the child has already been poisoned. Connecticut’s children would benefit from primary prevention in creating lead safe communities across our state to ensure children’s health.

I thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. There is no obligation more critical than protecting the state’s most vulnerable children. I urge the Committee to vote favorably on H.B. 5403 for the establishment of a Task Force to Study Lead Abatement.

Respectfully submitted,

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Center for Children’s Advocacy


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