



Testimony Regarding H.B. No. 5045, An Act Reducing Lead Poisoning

Karen Siegel, MPH
Public Health Committee
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Dear esteemed members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Karen Siegel and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Health Equity Solutions (HES), where I serve as Director of Policy. Health Equity Solutions is a nonprofit organization with a statewide focus on promoting policies, programs, and practices that result in equitable health care access, delivery, and outcomes for all people in Connecticut. Our vision is for every Connecticut resident to attain optimal health regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding H.B. No. 5045, An Act Reducing Lead Poisoning. **We strongly support promoting healthy and lead safe homes to advance health equity.**

Lead poisoning causes irreversible impairment and is both all too common and entirely preventable. No family should be in the position of knowing their child has lead poisoning and being unable to stop the exposure and seek early intervention to mitigate its impact. Structural racism and its consequences mean that Black, Latino/a, and Asian children are at disproportionately high risk of lead poisoning.¹ Over half of lead poisoning cases occur in urban centers that have older housing stock and more rental properties.^{2,3}

Connecticut has an opportunity to address this significant inequity in health by aligning the state lead screening and intervention standards with federal guidance and funding lead remediation/abatement and other health and safety improvements in housing.

Connecticut currently adheres to an outdated Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) threshold for lead poisoning (5 µg/dl).⁴ Parental notification does not occur until a child has tested as having nearly three times (10 µg/dl) the baseline threshold for lead poisoning, at which time the child may already experience developmental delays. An inspection to identify the cause of poisoning is only required when a child is poisoned at four times the federal threshold for lead poisoning. ***This means that poisoned children may continue to be exposed to lead even after a blood test shows they have lead poisoning*** unless their family is able to identify and remediate the source of the poisoning on their own, without support. This is especially troubling for renters, who have little control over housing

¹ Connecticut Open Data, *Connecticut Childhood Lead Poisoning Surveillance Report*. Retrieved from <https://data.ct.gov/stories/s/Childhood-Lead-Poisoning-Surveillance-Health-Dispa/fyci-9e2u>

² Connecticut Department of Public Health, *2017 Annual Childhood Lead Poisoning Surveillance Report*. Retrieved from https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/DPH/dph/environmental_health/lead/Surveillance_reports/CY-2017-Annual-Lead-Surveillance-Report-Updated-2-27-2020Final.pdf

³ Seaberry, C., Davila, K., Abraham, M. (2021). Equity Report. New Haven, CT: DataHaven. Retrieved from <https://ctdatahaven.org/sites/ctdatahaven/files/DataHaven%20Health%20Equity%20Connecticut%20061820.pdf>

⁴ Ruckart PZ, Jones RL, Courtney JG, et al. Update of the Blood Lead Reference Value — United States, 2021. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2021;70:1509–1512. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7043a4>



conditions and limited choices given the state's high housing costs.⁵ Further, nearly three in four homes in Connecticut was built before lead was banned from paint in 1978.⁶

HES supports the proposal to provide parental notification of any lead poisoning that meets the federal threshold of 3.5 µg/dl and reduce the level necessary to trigger an inspection or epidemiological investigation. We recommend the following to further address inequities caused by lead poisoning:

- Aligning the triggers for intervention so inspection occurs for all cases of lead poisoning by 2025
- Providing additional support for landlords and homeowners in high-risk cities to engage in lead remediation before poisoning occurs
- Increasing public health campaigns to raise awareness about the need for lead screening and options for lead remediation to ensure programs reach more of Connecticut's residents

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony regarding H.B. No. 5045, An Act Reducing Lead Poisoning. I can be reached with any questions at ksiegel@hesct.org or 860.937.6437.

⁵ Connecticut United Ways, *Alice in Connecticut: A financial hardship study*. Retrieved from https://alice.ctunitedway.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020ALICEReport_CT_FINAL-8-20-20.pdf

⁶ Connecticut By The Numbers, *Housing Stock in CT Cities Among Nation's Oldest*. Retrieved from <https://ctbythenumbers.news/ctnews/2017/08/23/housing-stock-in-ct-cities-among-nations-oldest>