



**NYS Senate Standing Committees on Health and
Housing, Construction, and Community Development
Joint Public Hearing: To discuss Childhood Lead Poisoning
Prevention in New York State**

November 30, 2021

**Testimony of Jim Anderson,
State Board Member of Citizen Action of New York**

I would first like to thank Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Senate Chair Rivera, and Senate Chair Kavanagh for holding today's hearing on the crisis of lead poisoning in our state. I would also like to thank all of the Senators who have taken their time to participate in today's hearing.

My name is Jim Anderson, and I serve on the state board of Citizen Action of New York. As you are all aware, New York holds the unforgivable title of being the state with the highest number of lead poisoned children in the country. There are policy experts here today who will provide you with vitally important facts and figures on how many children this impacts across the various regions of the state. They will also speak to you about how the data we have in regards to these numbers is insufficient, and how the state has failed to meet its responsibility in both tracking the scope of this crisis

and assessing the effectiveness of interventions. Today, I would like to use my time to speak to you about my experiences in my hometown of Buffalo and explain to you what we need from the state in order to end this crisis once and for all.

In 2017 alone, about 700 children tested positive for lead poisoning in Erie County. The majority of these children were located in Buffalo's low-income neighborhoods, which are predominantly Black and brown communities. According to the Center for Governmental Research, children who live in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods in Buffalo are 12 times more likely than children in mostly white neighborhoods to have an elevated blood lead level. In a 2017 national report, Reuters found Buffalo to be "among the most dangerous lead hot spots in America". In the Buffalo neighborhoods most impacted by lead contamination, children tested positive for lead poisoning at rates eight times higher than children in Flint, Michigan during the height of their water crisis. Yet, despite these facts that should have spurred immediate and intense intervention by our state government to address a generational assault on Black and brown families, there has been no meaningful investment or action to protect the children in Buffalo or other cities in the same situation.

I have worked within my community in an attempt to fight this crisis at the local level. With coalition partners, I have fought for funding to remove lead from homes, educate parents on the risks they face, and provide treatment services for families with lead poisoned children. However, this approach does not work. In Buffalo, we continuously face challenges seeing funds that are supposed to be used to address these issues actually make their way into the hands of those who need it. It is extremely difficult to get answers as to how much money there is, where it is going, and what the exact steps and timelines are to ensure that Buffalo is moving towards becoming a lead free city. The fact is that Buffalo has dealt with this crisis for far too long, and far too many families have suffered across generations with very little progress having been made. Placing the burden on localities to plan, implement, and fund the solutions to this crisis doesn't work. The

state must no longer absolve itself of its responsibility to solve this crisis once and for all.

Today, what I am asking for is state policy that requires that every rental house and unit be tested unless an owner can prove that it has already been tested and is lead free. We cannot continue to have a system where children are the testing strips for lead contamination. I am asking for the state to hold cities and towns responsible when they don't do these inspections, and step in and take control when this happens. I am asking the state to include in the budget a large amount of money for cities and towns to use for inspectors and to provide assistance for remediation when needed. The Black and brown children of my city and of this state should not be the population that is deprioritized once again during the 2022 legislative session. Quite simply, I am asking that the state do what it should have done decades ago: end this crisis of lead poisoning and end it now, so that another generation of children of color and children in poverty don't start their lives with health problems that ensure that they never even have a chance to reach their potential.