

**Written Testimony by Katrina Smith Korfmacher**

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Joint – Senate Standing Committee on Health  
Senate Standing Committee on Housing, Construction and Community Development

Regarding Hearing to discuss Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention in New York State  
November 30, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the critical issue of childhood lead poisoning prevention. Lead poisoning remains the most severe New York state has .

I am a Professor of Environmental Medicine at the University of Rochester. I hold a MS in Water Quality Management and PhD in Environmental Studies from Duke University. I have worked to initiate, support, and evaluate community partnerships and programs related to childhood lead poisoning prevention, healthy homes, air quality, land use, and other environmental justice issues in Rochester for 20 years.

I have been a member of the Rochester-based Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning since 2001, serving on a variety of committees including the Science, Education, Government Relations, and Executive Committees. Much of my scholarship during this same time period has analyzed, informed, or evaluated primary prevention programs, particularly the City of Rochester's 2005 lead law.

Based on this work, I have published numerous articles, policy briefs, and other materials that evaluate the impact of Rochester's nationally-recognized model for lead poisoning prevention. My recent book, "Bridging Silos: Collaborating for Environment, Health and Justice in Urban Communities" includes a chapter analyzing the origin, impact, and lessons learned from Rochester's lead law (Chapter 4) (the book may be downloaded for free at: <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/bridging-silos>). For additional publications, please see: <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/people/23498273-katrina-smith-korfmacher>. Several key publications relevant to your current deliberations are listed below:

Korfmacher, K.S., E. Benfer, and M. Chachère. 2019. Lead Laws and Environmental Justice in New York. *The New York Environmental Lawyer*, Vol. 39, No. 1, Fall/Winter 2019  
[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3492119](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3492119)

Analyzes the current state of lead hazards and lead laws in New York State, and the gaps in current legislation that disproportionately affect low income and children of color.

Korfmacher, K.S. and K. Holt. 2018. The potential for proactive housing inspections to inform public health interventions. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*. 24(5): 444-447. Based on data from Rochester's 26 inspection areas, analyses and establishes the ability of proactive rental inspection results to consistently identify hazards, target interventions/programs/resources, and evaluate changes in hazards that affect children's health over time and across neighborhoods.

Korfmacher, K.S. and M. Hanley. 2013. Are local laws the key to ending childhood lead poisoning? *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law*. 38(4): 757-814.

Reviews the existing local lead laws in cities across the country, comparing their standards for inspection, lead remediation, and enforcement. Finds a dearth of evaluation of the impacts/effectiveness, and the need for such future studies. Identifies the elements and options for primary prevention systems.

Korfmacher, K.S., M. Ayoob, R.L. Morley. 2012. Rochester's lead law: Evaluation of an environmental health policy innovation. *Environmental Health Perspectives*. 120(2):309-315.

Evaluates changes in lead hazards, childhood blood lead levels, initial implementation, and compliance costs of the first several years of Rochester's lead law. *Median compliance costs were lower in higher value properties (\$120) than lower (\$400). Rental property owners were more favorable toward the law after implementation than before it was passed.*

Korfmacher, K.S. and K. Kuholski. 2007. Do the same houses poison many children? An investigation of lead poisoning in Rochester New York, 1993-2004. *Public Health Reports*. 122(4): 483-487.

A smaller number of 'repeat poisoning' homes were found in Rochester than elsewhere. The frequency of homes that poison multiple children over time supports the need for risk assessment, permanent documentation, and disclosure of information to future residents/owners that federal law does not provide.

Overall, the evidence from Rochester strongly supports the ability of a systematic, proactive system of rental housing inspection to reduce childhood lead poisoning. Lead rates have declined everywhere, but a 2014 analysis by the Monroe County Health Department found that Rochester's rates had decreased 2.4 times faster than elsewhere in New York (Kennedy, 2014) (Kennedy, Byron S., et al. "Declines in Elevated Blood Lead Levels Among Children, 1997–2011." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 46.3 (2014): 259-264).

Based on these and other evidence of this system's success, Rochester has served as a model for or provided input to dozens of other cities across the country, including Cleveland, which passed a sweeping lead ordinance in 2019, and Pittsburgh, where a new local law was adopted in November 2021.

Given this body of work, I recommend you consider:

- The urgent need for publicly available, up-to-date, and geographically specific (zip code) data on childhood lead testing rates and results. This is essential to design programs, evaluate impact, and target resources efficiently, particularly for children living in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

- For the children most likely to be most severely affected by lead, housing (lead in paint, dust, and soil) remains by far the most significant source of exposure.
- “Knowledge is power”- if every residential building built before 1978 were tested JUST ONE TIME for lead, and this information PRESERVED IN A DURABLE FASHION (i.e. attached to deed), future residents and buyers would have the knowledge to find, fund, and fix hazards that might poison their children.
- Prevention is key – every child deserves to live in a lead-safe home. We have sanitary standards and inspection processes at restaurants to protect customers from purchasing unsafe food products. We similarly need a system of standards, inspections, and enforcement for housing that is offered as a commercial product via rental.

Fortunately, based on work in Rochester, New York City, and an increasing number of cities and states across the country, we have ample models and information on how to design, implement, and enforce policies that efficiently, effectively, and equitably prevent children from being lead poisoned.