

Testimony of

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Senate Standing Committee on Health  
Senate Standing Committee on Housing, Construction and Community  
New York State Senate

“To discuss childhood lead poisoning prevention in New York State.”

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## **Introduction**

Greetings: Chairman Rivera, Chairman Kavanagh, and Members of both Committees.

I am Oceanna Fair. I live on the South Side of Syracuse. I am a mother and grandmother. I worked 15 years as a traveling nurse in Central New York. I am a woman of color, a civic leader, and someone whose family is directly affected by childhood lead poisoning.

Yes, there are lifespan consequences from childhood lead poisoning. In about 1982 my parents were renting when my brother, Bobby, now 41, was severely lead poisoned. Since then, family has assisted him with cooking, bathing and daily activities. He was robbed of his future at the age of 2.

In my family, this environmental disease has become generational. My granddaughter was recently lead poisoned in my home when we were renting the property. The landlord never addressed, nor informed us, of the lead hazards present.

We know childhood lead poisoning disproportionately harms families of color. However, our voices are disproportionately absent from the discussion and design of policy responses. Those of us closest to the problem have been furthest from the power to solve it.

But these challenges shouldn't and won't stop us. Let me share my own personal response.

First, to see that the boys and girls who grow up with my grandchildren's children don't have to face this devastating disease. Because it is completely preventable.

Second, I am an elected leader of the community group, Families for Lead Freedom Now! So I am also present on behalf of our co-leaders: Mr. Gabriel Mkandama, Mr. Feruzi Murairi, Mrs. Bonfrida Kakwaya, and Mrs. Darlene Medley-Williams. We bring moral and spiritual resources to bear upon this problem.

**People's Public Hearing: Environmental Justice for Syracuse Now: June 12, 2021 (video excerpts: <https://www.leadfreedomny.org/peoples-public-hearing-2021>)**

Now, let me share what we heard from parents and others this past summer at our first-ever "People's Public Hearing: Environmental Justice for Syracuse Now."

Common Council President, the Honorable Helen Hudson, said her son was lead poisoned in her home when she was a new mother and homeowner. The seller never disclosed the presence of lead hazards.

NY Civil Liberties Union's Lanessa Chaplin described a double impact upon our families: One, we aren't wealthy enough to escape landlords who lease run-down housing. Two, there's no public campaign massive enough to help us check lead poisoning at the porch steps.

A New American mother testified to the pain of coming to America with the promise of peace, to discover we have a government that can't prevent refugee children from suffering lead poisoning.

Anthropologist Sandra D. Lane told us even some of our local medical professionals think lead poisoning is a thing of the past.

**Concerns about Lead Poisoning from I-81 Viaduct Construction**

Finally, let's consider the upcoming, necessary, demolition of the 1.5 mile Interstate 81 Viaduct. I-81's peeling bridge paint may have a far higher lead concentration than the house paint already harming our children.

Will the Contractor protect our children in nearby public housing from toxic bridge paint dust? Will workers be protected from lead dust and bringing that contamination back into their homes?

The time to invest in the health of this generation and generations to come is now.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.