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Testimony of
Orlando J. Rodriguez
Connecticut Education Association
Before the Public Health Committee

February 25nd, 2019

Re: HB 7133 AN ACT CONCERNING BLOOD LEAD LEVEL REQUIREMENTS

CEA supports HB 7133

Good morning Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Somers, Representative Petit, and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Orlando Rodriguez. I serve as the Research and Policy Development Specialist for the Connecticut Education Association, which is the largest teachers' union in Connecticut representing tens of thousands of active and retired teachers who inform our legislative priorities.

Research has proven that exposure to lead severely decreases the ability of a child to learn and reason.ⁱ The consequences are permanent and the effect on cognitive abilities continues through adulthood. Children who are exposed to lead have more aggression and increased criminal behavior as young adults.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, studies suggest that exposure to lead at an early age may increase the chance of getting Alzheimer's disease later in life.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lowered the maximum allowable lead exposure in children to 5 micrograms per deciliter of blood.^{iv} However, Connecticut is still using the older standard of 10 micrograms per deciliter of blood – double the CDC maximum.^v The CDC may lower the lead threshold further because “... *there is no identified threshold or safe level of lead in blood.*”^{vi,vii}

In Connecticut, the highest incidences of lead poisoning in children occur in urban areas, which is where most of the state's Black and Hispanic children live.^{viii} Is there a link to the low standardized test scores from students in urban areas? The answer is yes. Research by the Connecticut Department of Public Health found that lead exposure among Connecticut's 4th graders decreased their scores on standardized tests.^{ix} One of the reasons for the large education gap between Whites and minorities, in Connecticut, is that our urban students are poisoned with lead because of where they live.

The state spends tens of millions of dollars annually for standardized testing.^{x,xi,xii} Instead, what if these monies were used to remediate lead from older housing units in urban areas? Might this shrink Connecticut's large education gap between Whites and minority students? It certainly seems a better investment of taxpayer dollars to first eliminate the sources of lead that are poisoning children *before* we test them. If ever there were an example of putting the cart before the horse, this is it. Let's get our children healthy first, and then measure their academic achievement.

We thank you for your time and interest.

Endnotes

ⁱ COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH. (2016, July). Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity. Pediatrics. Retrieved from American Academy of Pediatrics: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/1/e20161493>

ⁱⁱ Wolpaw Reyes, J. (2014). LEAD EXPOSURE AND BEHAVIOR: EFFECTS ON ANTISOCIAL AND RISKY BEHAVIOR AMONG CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS. Cambridge: NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH. Retrieved February 20, 2019, from <https://www.nber.org/papers/w20366>

ⁱⁱⁱ Eid, A., Bihaqi, S. W., Renehan, W. E., & Zawia, N. H. (2016). Developmental lead exposure and lifespan alterations in epigenetic regulators and their correspondence to biomarkers of Alzheimer's disease. *Alzheimer's & Dementia: Diagnosis, Assessment & Disease Monitoring* 2, 123-131. Retrieved February 20, 2019, from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352872916000063>

^{iv} COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH. (2016, July). Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity. Pediatrics. Retrieved from American Academy of Pediatrics: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/1/e20161493>

^v Connecticut State Department of Public Health. (2019, February 23). Lead Case Response and Investigation. Retrieved February 23, 2019, from <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Environmental-Health/Lead-Poisoning-Prevention-and-Control/Statutes-and-Regulations#CT%20Gen%20Statues>

^{vi} COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH. (2016, July). Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity. Pediatrics. Retrieved from American Academy of Pediatrics: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/1/e20161493>

^{vii} SCHNEYER, J., & PELL, M. B. (2016, December 30). CDC considers lowering threshold level for lead exposure. Retrieved February 21, 2019, from <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/assets/usa-lead/CDC-considers-lowering-threshold-level-for-lead-exposure.pdf>

^{viii} content/uploads/2016/06/11_assessment_chingos_final_new.pdf

Connecticut Fair Housing Center. (2015). Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice 2015. Retrieved February 23, 2019, from https://www.ct.gov/doh/lib/doh/analysis_of_impediments_2015.pdf

^{ix} Edwards, S., Anthopolos, R., & Miranda, M. (2013). The Impact of Early Childhood Lead Exposure on Educational Test Performance among Connecticut Schoolchildren Phase II Report. University of Michigan, School of Natural Resources and Environment. Retrieved February 20, 2019, from https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/School-Nursing/Publications/linking_lead_and_education_data_phaseii.pdf

^x Chingos, M. M. (2012). STRENGTH IN NUMBERS State Spending on K-12 Assessment Systems . Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings. Retrieved February 23, 2019, from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/11_assessment_chingos_final_new.pdf

^{xi} Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). Public School Enrollment. Retrieved January 14, 2019, from EdSight: <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>

^{xiii} Bestor, J. (2016, June 29). Cost of SBAC testing in Connecticut is unconscionable, unnecessary. The CT Mirror. Retrieved February 23, 2019, from <https://ctmirror.org/category/ct-viewpoints/cost-of-sbac-testing-in-connecticut-is-unconscionable-unnecessary/>