

Statement Regarding Childhood Lead Poisoning Program Internal Investigation

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Over the last several weeks, there have been numerous media reports regarding concerns within the City of Milwaukee Health Department's (MHD) Childhood Lead Poisoning Program (CLPP). First and foremost, I am deeply concerned about the health and safety of all children within the City of Milwaukee.

It is important to note that there is an ongoing investigation to ask the tough questions, follow the facts wherever they lead, and get children the care they need. This is exactly what I want to see happen.

Unfortunately, several media reports and allegations levied by others have not told the complete story. This investigation, which is deep and far-reaching, will ultimately yield answers as to when, how, and why programmatic concerns developed within the CLPP and who was involved. Given the scope and complexity of the ongoing work, I cannot predict when the investigation will be finished. However, it is my sincere belief that the results of the investigation, when it is completed, will confirm that upon my direction, necessary action was taken to identify mismanagement and hold individuals accountable. In addition, the investigation will find that I followed City of Milwaukee protocol by initiating disciplinary action and informing executive leadership about this issue.

What's more, the removal of lead hazards from all sources requires that every crucial resource in Milwaukee, the State of Wisconsin and the federal government be dedicated to protecting residents. Childhood lead poisoning remains a critical public health concern. Further, leaders at all levels of government have an obligation and responsibility to prioritize the removal of lead services lines in Wisconsin. This is a statewide problem.

When I arrived at MHD almost 17 years ago, the agency needed executive leadership. During my tenure, we worked hard to become one of the premier academic health departments in the nation. As Health Commissioner, I honored MHD's mission to safeguard the public's health. To this end, I am certain that the investigation will establish that I acted in the best interests of the residents of the City of Milwaukee at all times and did not engage in any wrongdoing.

Finally, reports indicating there was a 'communications gag order' in place within MHD are emphatically false. The Communications Policy instituted within MHD – similar to policies at other organizations – was designed to ensure that a chain of command and protocols were followed when communicating with elected officials. The protocol detailed within the policy was in place during my entire tenure; it was not implemented in response to the CLPP concerns. The policy was chronicled in October 2017 to comply with national public health accreditation board requirements. It was imperative that staff convey MHD policy when speaking as part of their job duties, rather than stating individual views and/or opinions. The policy did not prohibit individuals from expressing their viewpoints or personal concerns on their own time.

I intend for this to be my sole statement on this matter given the ongoing investigation. As a result, and in keeping with the motto of this great state, I am moving forward.

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