

March 22, 2019

President Ashanti Hamilton, Chair
Steering & Rules Committee
Milwaukee Common Council
200 E. Wells Street, Room 205
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear President Hamilton and Committee Members:

Thank you for holding this hearing and for your efforts in addressing lead poisoning prevention as an important public health issue. My name is Dr. Heather Paradis and I am a pediatrician and medical director of Community Services at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. As a primary care provider, I have too often been in the position to tell parents in this city that their child is lead poisoned. And as a public health advocate, I can't stress the importance of continued focus and attention to the issues related to prevention, early identification, and treatment of pediatric lead poisoning.

Lead is a significant public health issue in our community. We understand firsthand the effects lead poisoning can have on a child's health and wellbeing, including learning difficulties, developmental delay and behavioral issues. There is no "natural" level of lead that comes from our diet or nature; therefore, any detectable level of lead in a person's bloodstream is there as environmental contamination. When it comes to lead and children, no level can be considered "safe."

At Children's, we are dedicated to providing the best care for children and we have implemented measures to increase testing and identification of children in need of care. We follow Wisconsin Lead Poisoning Prevention Program guidelines and recommendations for testing, including enhanced testing for children who live in areas with elevated lead poisoning risk: children covered by Medicaid and those residing in the cities of Milwaukee and Racine. We have equipped each of our primary care sites with point of care instruments, so results are immediately known and shared with both families and local health department at the time of testing. Lead testing compliance is one of our internal quality metrics for Primary Care, Children's Community Health Plan, and the Care4Kids program serving children in out-of-home care.

Once a case of pediatric lead poisoning has been identified and confirmed, pediatricians and other health providers rely on the work of local health departments to conduct environmental assessments, identify, and mitigate the sources of contamination. We welcome opportunities to partner more closely with the Milwaukee Health Department around co-management of children with lead poisoning. While much of Wisconsin's lead poisoning continues to stem from degrading paint sources, efforts to protect our water supply and identify other potential significant sources of lead on a case-by-case basis are critical to reducing incidence of this harmful condition.

Continuing to emphasize and prioritize testing during the early years of a child's life is essential to maintain focus on the issue. Unlike other cities in the Great Lakes region, we have seen the number of children who are hospitalized for chelation therapy due to lead poisoning rise every 2-year period since 2013. This is an issue that we can't ignore, and that needs continued focus and attention to address.

Eliminating the lead risk in our community will continue to take committed and coordinated action by community, health and government entities. We are thankful that city and state officials are looking at this as a public health issue and we encourage and support focused efforts and resources on lead poisoning prevention. Children's had a recent meeting with the City of Milwaukee Health Department and are looking to find ways to strengthen our partnership on this issue. We are also glad to engage in community partnerships, including the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership, to promote lead screening efforts and to decrease exposure to lead.

Our children face so many potential threats to health and well-being during the first years of life, years that are foundational to their growth and development. Lead exposure is one threat that we have the ability to control and to mitigate the risks. We appreciate the work of this Committee and want to serve as a resource on this important public health matter facing Milwaukee. We must ensure the City of Milwaukee is doing its part to protect the health of its children and most vulnerable community members. Please let us know if we can provide additional information to help facilitate your important work.

Thank you for your service to the citizens of the City of Milwaukee.

Sincerely,

Heather Paradis, MD, MPH
Medical Director, Community Services
Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
hparadis@chw.org