

MICAH Presentation to Steering and Rules Committee

Monday, October 19, 2020

Council President Johnson and esteemed Alderpersons, thank you for this opportunity for us to represent MICAH before the Steering and Rules Committee this morning. We are especially grateful to Alderwoman Coggs for extending to MICAH the invitation to make this presentation with our social justice concerns.

As an interfaith organization, MICAH is currently engaged in issues of mass incarceration, racial equity in jobs and economic development, and racial discrimination against African American students in school suspensions in the Milwaukee Public School system. We are also working hard at a Relational Voter Program to register and turn out thousands of voters this fall within and through our 38 member congregations. At our annual public meeting on October 22 we will be welcoming eight more congregations into our membership, increasing our ranks to 46 congregations.

In 2018 MICAH helped to organize the Coalition On Lead Emergency (COLE) which has emerged as a leading community voice in the struggle against lead poisoning of children in Milwaukee. COLE is comprised of 13 member organizations with more organizations currently considering membership. MICAH leaders are active in COLE and chair COLE's Organizing Committee and Workforce Development Committee. Hephatha Lutheran Church on 18th and Locust, a key member congregation of MICAH, has served as the spiritual and geographical center of COLE since COLE's inception. Hephatha's parish nurse chairs the Education Committee of COLE.

MICAH thanks you for the almost unanimous decision last year to include \$240,000 in the 2020 City budget for the Birthing Moms Pilot Project. While COVID-19 blocked the implementation of this project in 2020, COLE leaders will be meeting with Milwaukee Health Department leadership in November to discern when and how the Birthing Moms Pilot Project will be launched in 2021. We are encouraged to see that the \$240,000 is secure in the proposed 2021 City Budget.

The primary issue cut that will be highlighted at MICAH's Virtual Public Meeting this Thursday evening is COLE's \$3.55 million ask for the Milwaukee Health Department in the 2021 City Budget. Each of you was sent this ask via email on October 9. This ask, as one important path on the road map to a lead safe Milwaukee, is the focus of our presentation to you this morning.

Imagine that you are the parent of a young child, perhaps a toddler. You are low income and can't afford to pay much in rent. Your apartment is in an old building that has layers of paint dating back before 1978. Lead dust is on your windowsill. The soil on the lot where your little one plays contains lead paint chips and residuals from the days when leaded gasoline fumes flowed into the yards of homes. The water that your child drinks travels through a lead service line into your basement and then through old plumbing that has lead in solder and fixtures. But actually you are not really aware of any of this. All you know is that your child, the love of your life, has just been tested at 5 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood. This is scary. You are not sure what this means. Why is your child sick? Surely the Milwaukee Health Department will help find the cause and remedy the situation.

But the Milwaukee Health Department can't. Because its budget is so limited that it can only conduct lead inspections and issue abatement orders in homes of children that have tested at or above 20 mcg/dL. In 2019 only 115 Milwaukee children tested at that dangerously high level. But Wisconsin

State Statute defines lead poisoned as being tested at or above 5 mcg/dL. Last year 1,745 Milwaukee children, including your child in this scenario, met this definition of lead poisoning. And yet these lead poisoned children did not qualify for lead inspections of their domiciles due to lack of funding. The parents of these children were left on their own to figure out whether lead in their home was poisoning their child and, if so, how in the world to get the home lead abated or find another apartment that is lead safe and affordable.

It doesn't have to be this way. **Given adequate resources, the Milwaukee Health Department can conduct lead inspections and issue consequent abatement orders in the homes of all children who are tested at or above 5 mcg/dL.** Lead in paint and soil can be removed. Certified lead water filters and essential educational resources can be given to the parents. Many parents will decide to move once they learn that there is lead in their home – not wanting to wait for what may be a lengthy process for abatement. Others will choose to be relocated during lead abatement. But the choice will be theirs, and their decisions will be based on accurate information. Parents, regardless of their income level or social status, have a right to such resources and such care from the city of Milwaukee.

What will this cost? **The Milwaukee Health Department calculates that it will cost \$3.55 million to conduct lead inspections and issue consequent abatement orders in the homes of all children who have tested at or above 5 mcg/dL.** Here is the breakdown of those costs as submitted by the MHD to COLE:

- 1) \$1,811,702 in salaries and fringe for
 - 9 assessors
 - 4 public health nurses
 - 2 environmental coordinators
 - 2 managers
 - 6 lab staff (chemists, lab assistants, etc.)
- 2) \$200,753 indirect cost/payroll/budget
- 3) \$320,000 for equipment
- 4) \$1,042,780 for supplies for 104,278 tests
- 5) \$95,000 for maintenance/service of lab equipment and information systems
- 6) \$80,000 for infrastructure/remodeling of space for staff and lab equipment

MICAH and COLE know that you are facing excruciating decisions in crafting next year's budget and that \$3.55 million is a significant cost. We also know, as do you, that lead poisoning inflicts its own horrific cost on children and their families. Lead poisoning may result in damage to the brain and nervous system, slow growth and development, learning and behavior problems, hearing and speech problems, and violent behavior and criminal activity. Think also of the emotional and relational toll on parents and children who see dashed dreams for their lives and their futures. All because of an affliction that was caused by humans and can be remedied by humans. Part of that remedy is in your hands.

We cannot help but point out the obvious: the \$3.55 million should properly come from the police department's enormous budget as one means of addressing underlying causes of crime and violence.

Doesn't it also make sense to weigh the short-term costs against the long term? The Wisconsin DHS stated in their 2014 Report on Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin that if lead poisoning in children

was completely eliminated, the state would save \$7 billion in costs for medical treatments, special education, and crime and juvenile delinquency. The report also stated there would be an estimated \$21 billion in new earnings because of increased high school graduation rates and lifetime ability to earn. "However, there is a solution to this serious and costly problem--remove LBP hazards from older homes." (page 6 <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p01202-14.pdf>)

Lead hazards include the thorny and contentious matter of lead service laterals. "EPA estimates that drinking water can make up 20 percent or more of a person's total exposure to lead. Infants who consume mostly mixed formula can receive 40 percent to 60 percent of their exposure to lead from drinking water." <https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/basic-information-about-lead-drinking-water> We can't continue to kick the LSL can down the road without placing future generations at serious risk from sudden and widespread failure of aging lead service lines. MICAH urges the Common Council to give close consideration of an option presented by Karen Dettmer to the Public Works Committee on July 15 which would seek a rate increase from the PSC of Wisconsin in order for Milwaukee Water Works to have the funds to replace all LSLs in the city of Milwaukee.

Lead poisoning is a multifaceted, complex nightmare that eludes simple solutions. We need a road map to a Lead Safe Milwaukee even as we know that there is no easy road to this destination. MICAH hopes that the Milwaukee Health Department with the support of city government and community partners will design such a road map. Several years ago, Sixteenth Street Community Health Centers crafted such a road map calling it "A Path to 0%." This document merits a close look. It strongly recommends universal lead testing, a physician scorecard, an action level at 5 mcg/dL, total home abatement, a clean hands doctrine, closing-initiated inspection and abatement, a registry of abated homes, primary prevention home visits, and lead-certified filters on every faucet.

We need a road map to a Lead Safe Milwaukee. We need to know what it will cost to travel that road. And we need to know where the money will come from. We need a Wisconsin State Legislature with the good sense to eliminate structural barriers to the fiscal health of Milwaukee and to allow the City to require lead-safe certification for rental properties. We also need a private-public partnership dedicated to funding the road to a Lead Safe Milwaukee.

MICAH urges the Common Council leadership and the Mayor to convene a table of philanthropists, foundations, hospitals, insurers, community partners, and government to create a Lead Safe Milwaukee Home Fund. Such a private-public partnership has been started in Cleveland:

https://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/news/local_news/mandel-foundation-5-million-gift-benefits-lead-safe-home-fund/article_adf40bd8-a5a1-11ea-97cd-570531cd8711.html

[Mayor Frank G. Jackson Proposes Legislation to invest \\$5 million into the Lead Safe Home Fund | City of Cleveland](#)

The significant progress that Milwaukee has already made in traveling the road to a Lead Safe Milwaukee is worth noting and applauding. But we need to continue to travel that road because the destination is still in the distance and more importantly because the lives of thousands of children are at stake.

Most immediately you can continue to lead Milwaukee down that road by increasing the budget of the Milwaukee Health Department by \$3.55 million in the 2021 City budget. The lives of 1,745 children may depend on your doing so.

On behalf of MICAH,

Rev. Joseph Ellwanger, a founding pastor of MICAH and MICAH Past President

Ledora Meadows. Member of Hephatha Lutheran Church and mother of a lead poisoned child

Rev. Mary Martha Kannass, pastor of Hephatha Lutheran Church

Rev. Dennis Jacobsen, Chair of COLE Organizing Committee and a founding pastor of MICAH