

Elmer, Linda

From: Joyce Ellwanger <joyce.ellwanger@gmail.com>
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To: Elmer, Linda
Subject: MICAHA & COLE Testimony to Steering & Rules Committee, Oct. 19, 2020

Testimony of Rev. Joseph Ellwanger to Steering & Rules Committee of the Milwaukee Common Council, October 19, 2020, on behalf of MICAHA and COLE:

Thanks for this opportunity to speak to you this morning. This is what democracy looks like. It is significant that almost every organization that has addressed you this morning has mentioned the lead crisis as an issue that the City of Milwaukee must solve if it is to move forward positively into the future.

I am Rev. Joseph Ellwanger, a retired Lutheran pastor, living at 1637 N. 16th St. and currently serving as a volunteer minister at Hephatha Lutheran Church, 18th and Locust. I am representing MICAHA (Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope), an interfaith network of 40 congregations working for justice. And I represent COLE (Coalition On Lead Emergency), formed by MICAHA and made up of 12 community organizations concerned about the lead crisis in Milwaukee.

Each of you should have received a three-page paper from MICAHA, explaining in detail the request of MICAHA and COLE, for the City to place \$3.55 million in the 2021 budget—to enable them to hire staff and purchase equipment so that they can inspect the home of every child under the age of six who tests positive for lead poisoning at level five, or above. The Health Department has been inspecting homes of children at level 20, or above, but the state has set level five as the level at which children are at risk for serious brain damage. The \$3.55 million is what the Health Department has estimated would be the cost of increasing staff and equipment necessary to inspect the homes of the 1,745 children that have tested at levels between five and 20.

Studies show that lead-poisoning in children is a major contributor to school suspensions and expulsions, to school dropouts and to violence, crime, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Eliminating lead poisoning in children is a much more humane, just, and effective way to get at violence and crime, than by adding to the number of police, or by punishing children and young adults for something they had no control over, and for something that society—and that's us—is really responsible for.

Milwaukee has taken the positive step of replacing lead laterals. But at the rate that this work is progressing at the present time, it will take decades to complete. And with the additional sources of lead poisoning in lead paint and lead in the soil, there will be thousands of children in Milwaukee for the next several decades who will be vulnerable to the behavior-altering effect of lead poisoning, and we will continue to wrestle with low academic outcomes and violence in the community.

What MICAHA and COLE are saying by our ask of \$3.55 million, is that we must start with the children here now, and the children who will be birthed in the next generation—to make sure they are all tested, and then to make sure that any child with level five, or above, is living in a home that is lead-safe. Not to laser focus on the children here now and to be sure that they are living in a lead-safe home is short-sighted and unconscionable. Difficult as this budget is, think of these children as your own, and I am sure that you will find the funding.