



Wednesday, November 13, 2019, 10:00am

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Oral Testimony

Before New York City Council

Committee on Health, jointly with the Committee on Housing and Buildings, the
Committee on Public Housing, and the Committee on Education

**Oversight - LeadFreeNYC and the enforcement of the City's
lead laws.**

Sonal Jessel
Policy & Advocacy Coordinator
WE ACT for Environmental Justice

Thank you for holding the hearing today and for the opportunity to testify
regarding New York City's lead laws.

I am Sonal Jessel, and I'm a Policy and Advocacy Coordinator at WE ACT for
Environmental Justice. Over the past 30 years, WE ACT has been combating
environmental racism in Northern Manhattan. WE ACT was part of the advocacy
team lead by Matt Chachere in drafting and fighting for the passage of Local Law 1
in 2004. I am here as a member of the New York City Coalition to End Lead
Poisoning, NYCCELP, a collection of experts and advocates who have been
involved in action to end lead poisoning. WE ACT is an original member of the
coalition. I myself have received my Master in Public Health from Columbia
University.

As many others will testify today, New York City, the Department of Housing
Preservation and Development and the Department of Health have failed to enforce
all aspects of Local Law 1, which sought to end lead-based paint exposure by 2010
for all New Yorkers. The passage of the law was exciting because it shifted the
burden of lead mitigation from the tenants to the landlords; tenants were no longer
responsible for dealing with lead problems in their homes. The law made it possible
to have systematic benefits for all tenants across the city.

Yesterday, NYCCELP published our report on lead violations, and found that only
about \$10,000 of fines have been collected for violations since the law was enacted
15 years ago. In contrast, we found that collections from street vendor health code
violations amounted to over \$5,000,000 in the past 15 years. Why does the city
impose and collect more penalties for street vending, but not for lead poisoning?
There is no excuse for failing to enforce the law when landlords endanger tenants'
health.

As a public health worker, I am deeply concerned about the City's consistent failure
to end lead poisoning. Lead poisoning causes serious harm to children's health,
damaging the brain and nervous system, leading to developmental delays,
behavioral problems, hearing and speech problems, and more (CDC) 1. These harms
are not treatable with simple medication, they have impacts that last through the





lifespan. “Imaging studies of adults who had elevated blood levels in childhood have demonstrated” negative impacts on the brain and nervous system, and children exposed to lead are at greater risk of becoming hypertensive adults. Lead can also cause pregnancy complications (American Academy of Pediatrics)². Lead poisoning is 100% preventable and there is no excuse for this to still be an issue.

Therefore, I join other advocates, experts, and community members to urge the City to enforce all parts of Local Law 1 by increasing penalties for landlords, adding additional measures for fine collections, coordinating more between agencies, and improving enforcement for safe work practices.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Sonal Jessel

Policy & Advocacy Coordinator
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1. Health Effects of Lead Exposure. *Center for Disease Control*. Retrieved on 12 November 2019 at: <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/prevention/health-effects.htm>
2. Lead Exposure in Children. American Academy of Pediatrics. Retrieved on 12 November 2019 at: <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/lead-exposure/Pages/Lead-Exposure-in-Children.aspx>