



501 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, NW · 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20001  
T 202.467.4900 · F 202.467.4949  
[www.childrenslawcenter.org](http://www.childrenslawcenter.org)

May 21, 2020

The Honorable Mary M. Cheh  
Councilmember  
District of Columbia Council  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Re: Committee on Transportation & the Environment  
Budget Oversight Hearing Regarding Department of Energy and the  
Environment

Dear Chairperson Cheh:

I am writing on behalf of Children's Law Center to express concern about proposed budget cuts that potentially could hamper the District's battle against childhood lead poisoning. Children's Law Center fights so every DC child can grow up with a loving family, good health and a quality education. With nearly 100 staff and hundreds of pro bono lawyers, Children's Law Center reaches 1 out of every 9 children in DC's poorest neighborhoods – more than 5,000 children and families each year.<sup>1</sup>

Under the Mayor's proposed budget, the Lead-Safe and Healthy Housing Division of the Department of Energy & Environment (DOEE) would have its budget cut 23%, from \$5.895M to \$4.526M. The budget documents provide little guidance on this proposed cut, other than to say that "DOEE's Local funds budget submission reflects a decrease of \$1,120,170, primarily in the Environment Services division, due to a reduction in equipment purchases and subsidies" and that "the proposed budget reflects a reduction of \$995,000 in Contractual Services in the Environmental and Energy divisions."

The Lead-Safe and Healthy Homes Division is part of the Environmental Services Administration and "ensures that the housing in the District does not pose a health threat to its occupants."<sup>2</sup> The Division includes two branches: (1) the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention and Healthy Homes Branch, which takes proactive steps to prevent harm caused by indoor environmental health threats and responds to all cases of children under age six identified with an elevated blood lead level; and (2) the Compliance and Enforcement Branch, which oversees the District's lead laws (including lead certification, accreditation, and

abatement requirements), and undertakes compliance monitoring and assistance as well as enforcement measures.<sup>3</sup>

We recommend that the Committee, during its May 21 budget oversight hearing, ask DOEE to specify how the proposed budget cuts would affect the Lead-Safe and Healthy Homes Division's responsibilities, particularly the important role it plays in reducing childhood lead poisoning and funding lead-hazard remediation and reduction efforts by third-party contractors. To the extent this vital work would be undermined by the proposed cuts, we urge the Committee to modify this aspect of the budget and restore the necessary funds to ensure a robust childhood lead-poisoning prevention program.

An ill-advised budget cut would ignore the fact that lead poisoning can severely and irreversibly harm a child's development. It would also be shortsighted given the enormous societal costs imposed by childhood lead poisoning.<sup>4</sup> As the Council stated in 2008, the "societal and monetary benefits of aggressive primary prevention measures speak for themselves when compared to treating children who have been exposed to lead and the subsequent social, behavioral and education problems they face."<sup>5</sup>

Thank you for providing us the opportunity to submit our views. Please include this submission in the record of the Committee's budget oversight hearing.

Respectfully submitted,

*Charles W. Logan*

Charles W. Logan

Special Counsel

Transmitted by email to abenjamin@dccouncil.us

---

<sup>1</sup> Children's Law Center fights so every child in DC can grow up with a loving family, good health and a quality education. Judges, pediatricians and families turn to us to advocate for children who are abused or neglected, who aren't learning in school, or who have health problems that can't be solved by medicine alone. With nearly 100 staff and hundreds of pro bono lawyers, we reach 1 out of every 9 children in DC's poorest neighborhoods – more than 5,000 children and families each year. And, we multiply this impact by advocating for city-wide solutions that benefit all children.

<sup>2</sup> <https://doee.dc.gov/page/environmental-services-administration> .

---

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> One study estimates that the lifetime economic burden of childhood lead exposure in DC could be as high as \$402 million – and that’s just for the 2019 birth cohort of children. *See* <http://valueofleadprevention.org/calculations.php?state=District%20Of%20Columbia>.

<sup>5</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on Public Works and the Environment, Committee Report on B17-0936, at 2-3 (Nov. 21, 2008), *available at* <http://lims.dccouncil.us/Download/19361/B17-0936-CommitteeReport1.pdf> .