



501 3rd Street, NW - 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20001
T 202.467.4900 · F 202.467.4949
www.childrenslawcenter.org

Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
February 20, 2026

Public Hearing:
Performance Oversight Hearing
Department of Energy & Environment

Saisha Nanduri
Staff Attorney
Children's Law Center

Introduction

Good morning, Chairperson Allen and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding DOEE. My name is Saisha Nanduri, and I am a Staff Attorney with the Children's Law Center's Healthy Together Team, and a District resident in Ward 2. The Children's Law Center's Healthy Together team works with medical providers to assist families and children with addressing health-harming legal needs, such as housing conditions.

Today, I will testify about my experience in trying to work with DOEE to provide relief to a family who lived in a rental unit that tested positive for lead hazards in at least fifty areas of the home and where the family's toddler tested positive for severe lead poisoning. I represented the family in their search for a safe place to relocate.

Lead poisoning can cause excruciating pain, learning difficulties, and long-term developmental delays. The long-term effects of lead poisoning can be irreversible and devastating. One of the best things that a family can do in this situation is to relocate to prevent further exposure. For our clients who receive rental or housing assistance, that proves to be nearly impossible.

My Interactions with DOEE In the Course of My Representation of a Client Showed Undeveloped Agency Standards.

In the course of my representation, I learned that DOEE was the District's regulator and enforcement agency for lead and, in this case, had ordered preliminary monetary sanctions against my client's landlord. I further learned that under DC Code § 8-231.03

(or the Lead Hazard Prevention and Elimination Act) and 20 DCMR § 3319, DOEE is authorized to order relocation assistance.

When I inquired with DOEE about agency assistance and enforcement, DOEE informed me that the lead levels in the child's blood were "not high enough" and the ~~lead based~~lead-based paint hazards were "not harmful or severe enough" to warrant ordering relocation. When I asked DOEE what would be "high enough" to order relocation, DOEE could not point to any internal, agency guidance that provides such standards. DOEE also informed me that if the landlord did not repair the ~~lead based~~lead-based paint hazards in the rental unit, the agency was reluctant to utilize administrative methods available to them to recover those fines. Not only was I confused by DOEE's unsupported conclusions, but I was troubled that DOEE did not effectively act under laws that already give them the authority to prevent lead exposure and protect families facing lead poisoning.¹ As a result, families are left to seek relief from an already overburdened court system.

I am deeply frustrated that our clients bear the consequences of undefined agency policies and gaps in enforcement. If, as an attorney, I was at a loss for solutions, families without legal representation would likely be left without a sense of where to start. With the recent move of the Healthy Homes program from DOEE to DC Health, I am more concerned than ever about how lead-related responsibilities have been divided among the agencies and how families can seek relief.

Conclusion

My colleague, Patrick Cothorn, will share oral and written testimony about how DOEE can improve transparency and performance.² Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am available to answer any questions.

¹ Patrick Cothorn, Children's Law Center, Testimony Before the District of Columbia Committee on Transportation and the Environment (Feb. 20, 2026), 2, *available at* https://childrenslawcenter.org/audience/policy-testimony/?post_type=&impact_area=&format=&case_issue=&agency%5B%5D=doee&event_type=&order_by=date#results

² DC Code §§ 8-231.01 to 8-233.06; 20 DCMR §§ 3300 – 3399.