



**Testimony in Opposition to Representative Merrin's Amendment to the Budget Bill
that Would Increase Lead Poisoning in Children**

The Ohio Senate

Finance – Health and Medicaid Subcommittee

May 23, 2017 | Columbus, Ohio

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Tavares and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak.

My name is Peter Ujvagi and I am a City Councilmember for the City of Toledo and along with Councilmember Larry Sykes we have worked on guiding the Toledo Lead ordinance through its development. We worked diligently to craft a local ordinance that has the potential to be a model for other cities and the state to address this serious public health problem.

Simply prohibiting cities from passing good government initiatives does not serve the needs of our citizens, and particularly our children who are most at risk to lead poisoning and its long term effects at a very young age.

Toledo is determined to take leadership in addressing this issue for our residents. The choice is clear. If the Merrin Amendment stays in the budget we will be prohibited from taking action. We would be forced to do nothing to prevent lead poisoning—only reacting after the poisoning has occurred. However, if it is removed Toledo will be a test market as we implement our local ordinance. Our ordinance will provide others with the opportunity to track and evaluate a reasonable, logical local government initiative to address this issue.

According to the CDC, there is no safe level of lead in a child's blood. The effects of exposure to lead in children are devastating and include: damage to the brain and nervous system, slowed development, learning and behavioral problems. Moreover, the signs and symptoms of lead poisoning are hard to detect and usually don't appear until large amounts of lead have accumulated in a child's system. And lead poisoning disproportionately affects children from low-income families and African Americans.

Lead poisoning can decrease IQs, cause juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior and increases the need for more special education in our public schools. Literally, many of the societal burdens the budget attempts to address including health, criminal justice and education could be significantly lightened if we could stop children from becoming poisoned.

Respectfully there is no reason to support an amendment to the state biennial budget (of 4760 pages). The amendment does not have anything to do with state budgeting over the next two

years, but specifically prohibiting municipalities from responding to an urgent health crisis in their community will negatively impact future budgets and legislatures for generations.

The City of Toledo did not take the passage and implementation of our lead ordinance lightly. A great deal of community dialogue, research, evaluation of lead ordinances in other cities, health statistics in Toledo and similar communities and the involvement of the medical community in Toledo along with the Toledo Lead Safe Coalition went into the development of the ordinance

Both ProMedica Health Partners and Mercy Health Partners, the two premier health systems in Northwest Ohio, along with the University of Toledo Medical Center strongly supported the legislation.

The lead ordinance as it is written today has responded to the concerns of investment property owners. The Kervin Institute of Ohio State University, in cooperation with the University of Toledo Jack Ford Urban Affairs Center developed a three year priority matrix to address lead issues in the most affected neighborhoods of Toledo. Investment owners will be able to easily identify which priority area their property is located. Compliance time has been extended to June 2018, 2019, and 2020 for the properties. A hardship program for those property owners who may have financial difficulties is being set up. Health Department Certification fee for the first two thousand inspections are being waived to encourage compliance. Extensive video and educational materials are continuing to be developed for both investment owners, tenants and owner occupied homes to help them reduce lead exposure risks.

The Toledo "Lead Safe" ordinance simply requires that the most common forms of exposure to lead, from deteriorated paint in rental properties be corrected. Making sure that paint in rental properties is not in a deteriorated condition, that lead dust contaminated window ledges are cleaned and sealed, and that bare soil is covered, will significantly decrease the risk that children living in these properties will be exposed to unsafe levels of lead.

When the city of Rochester, New York added a lead-paint inspection requirement to its housing code for rental properties, cases of lead poisoning declined by an estimated than 80%. Toledo is simply adopting a similar approach to the nationally recognized and documented Rochester approach.

We respectfully request that the Merrin amendment be removed from the House Bill 49 and that the City of Toledo be recognized for its initiative to address a significant community health challenge. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.