

## **SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Chairman Oelslager

Vice Chair Manning

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Jennifer Sekerak

My name is Jennifer Sekerak. I am writing today to speak on my experience with lead exposure.

In 2013 our family moved to Leetonia, Ohio into a rental property. At the time my children were 14, 8, and 18 months old. When arriving to the property I was made aware that the property had to have a rental inspection and the inspector was on his way. The house passed with flying colors even though the exterior paint was peeling very, very badly.

Over the next few months I started to notice a change in my 18-month old baby. He started to refuse food and quit sleeping, it got so bad he was sleeping less than 4 hours a day and only drinking milk. As time went on it got much worse: he started eating dirt, banging his head off the walls and screaming, and quit babbling or talking. And then the melt down's started due to lack of communication skills and regression.

At this point he became very ill, so ill he was to the point he would not stop vomiting. We rushed him to the emergency room and when the doctor came in he told us he had found something wrong with his blood test and we needed to be transferred to Akron Children's Hospital. Once we arrived, we were told it was classic lead poisoning and he was severely anemic but they would not lead test because they could not follow up so we were sent home.

It took a few weeks to get a new doctor to accept him as a new patient, and sick. When we finally got the test we found out he was a level 19 and our worst fears were confirmed. Our baby was poisoned. The lead wiped out his iron to a dangerously low level and mentally he was very delayed- though at his year check up he was fine and thriving.

I was told the State of Ohio would be in contact due to the poisoning. When they came to test the property, we found out that the peeling paint was leaded, the porches, windows, molding, even the dirt had lead in it. We had to leave the property and throw away anything that could not be cleaned. Our beds, couches, stuffed animals, anything cloth. In the end we lost \$10,000's and our baby was brain damaged.

Since the exposure, life has been very hard. Joshua is now 5 years old and a special needs student at Leetonia. He receives a number of therapies, is on mental health meds, and receives social security. I want to say things are better, but they are not. Joshua is mentally delayed and has a one-on-one teacher due to behavior and sensory issues. He has been labeled autistic, is mentally 2, and still drinks from a baby bottle. I can go on and on about what's wrong- it is a list longer than my arm- from parasites from the dirt he ate due to his low iron from the lead to the rare diseases he has that no one can figure out where it came.

I do know that the city zoning officer who inspected our home before we rented could have stopped this. I never knew about lead paint, but he knew the ages of the children moving in and if I was told, "Oh this is a hazard for your children." I would have never moved a single box in. I would have a normal healthy 5 year old boy, but instead I have a special needs child who needs SSI, one-on-one teaching, therapy, and on and on. Just saving him from exposure would have saved the government tens of thousands in medical, benefits and schooling. Our life has been turned upside down, we are in financial ruin and my son's future is bleak. I don't wish this on anyone. Please help us change the laws to protect our children and grandchildren to come.