



JNESO

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JNESO URGES ASSEMBLY HEALTH COMMITTEE TO PRIORITIZE ADDRESSING LEAD CONTAMINATION IN NEW JERSEY

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NORTH BRUNSWICK – On Monday, February 22nd, JNESO Executive Director Douglas Placa and Community Organizer Thurese Calhoun were invited to appear before the Assembly Health and Senior Services Committee for a hearing on the impact of lead contamination in New Jersey. Placa and Calhoun spoke to the efforts undertaken on a daily basis by JNESO's members at Newark's Department of Health and Community Wellness, and delivered the following testimony:

Chairman Conaway and members of the Committee, thank you for holding this important hearing on the issue of lead contamination and its impact on New Jersey's families and children.

My name is Doug Placa, and I am the Executive Director of JNESO District Council 1, a healthcare union representing over 5,000 nurses and licensed technical employees at facilities throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Among these 5,000 healthcare workers, we represent the nurses at the City of Newark's Department of Health and Community Wellness. With me to today is JNESO's Community Organizer and recent chair of Newark's annual "Healthy Homes Lead Awareness Walk," Theresa Calhoun.

Recent news reports have highlighted the fact that New Jersey has 11 cities and two counties in which there was a higher concentration of children with elevated levels of lead in their blood in 2014 than the 3.3% of Flint children under age 6 discovered with too much lead in their blood in 2015. Newark is among those 11 cities.

Long before the crisis in Flint, Michigan catapulted the issue of lead contamination in our communities into the national spotlight, JNESO's nurses in the City of Newark have served on the front lines of educating the public about the life-altering dangers that lead exposure can have on the children and families that live in the City.

New Jersey's lead exposure crisis primarily stems from the remnants of the materials used in some of our state's older buildings. The use of lead based paint and other materials in buildings constructed before 1978 are often cited as the primary culprits, and it is part of our members' jobs to ensure that members of the community have the information they need to protect themselves against this environmental health hazard.

Our membership partners with community organizations throughout the City of Newark to bring awareness to this dangerous reality, providing information about ways to reduce children's exposure and risk factors. Encouraging parents to understand the history of the buildings in which they live and raise their families – particularly if they are considering any home improvement or renovation - is an important step in that process. This helps parents take the necessary precautions to protect their families before undertaking any project that might put their children at risk.

Educating the public about best practices to prevent lead exposure also includes simple reminders of regular hand washing, cleaning children's toys frequently, and keeping children away from bare soil when playing outdoors. It also involves providing parents with information about how to store food and liquid in lead free containers as well as how to minimize risks when preparing baby formula for young children.

Our membership also participates in Newark's annual "Healthy Homes Lead Awareness Walk," which seeks to raise awareness throughout the city and gain the attention of families who may be at risk of lead exposure in their homes. Such efforts have touched the lives of many families throughout the city.

As an organization whose membership works so closely with a community impacted by the dangers of lead exposure, we were disappointed to learn of the Governor's recent veto of legislation that would have restored \$10 million to a lead remediation fund.

On behalf of our membership, I implore you to not only continue to explore this issue, but to work to find ways to invest in programs and services to educate families, screen children, and remove lead from our communities once and for all.

Thank you again for working to explore and address this important public health issue.

JNESO District Council 1 is a professional healthcare union representing over 5,000 healthcare professionals in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and is an affiliate of the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE).

Learn more at: www.jneso.org.

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