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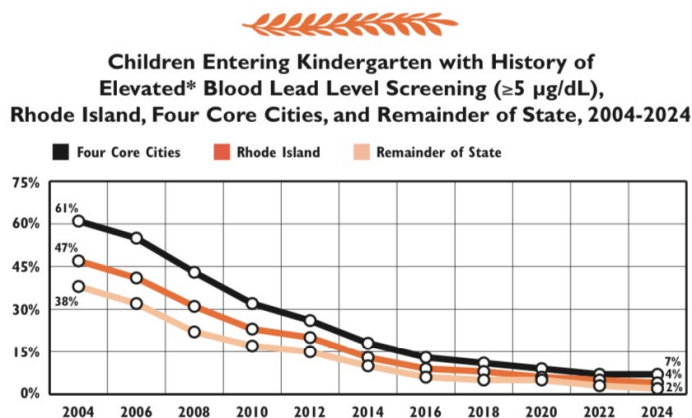
Testimony Re: H-7225 Article 3 Related to the Lead Rental Registry
House Finance Committee
February 29, 2024
Kaitlyn Rabb, Policy Analyst

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its opposition to changes contained in Budget Article 3, Section 17 of the Governor's proposed budget that would weaken the lead poisoning prevention and housing equity legislation that was passed last year and delay the timeline for its implementation.**

Lead poisoning is a serious and entirely preventable children's health and environmental justice issue with lifelong consequences, affecting hundreds of Rhode Island children every year. Lead exposure, even at very low levels, can cause irreversible damage, including slowed growth and development, learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and neurological damage. Though rare, severe poisoning can result in seizures, comas, and even death. The societal costs of childhood lead poisoning include the loss of future earnings due to cognitive impairment and increased medical, special education, and juvenile justice costs.

Lead exposure occurs in places where children spend the most time, especially in their homes. Exposure can come from lead paint in older homes, contaminated soil, and contaminated drinking water from tens of thousands of remaining lead service lines statewide contributes to these levels.

Rhode Island has a lead poisoning prevention foundation that involves several prevention, surveillance, and enforcement mechanisms that have led to a significant decline in the number of children with lead poisoning.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Healthy Homes and Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, Children entering kindergarten between 2004 and 2024. *Elevated blood lead level of ≥ 5 $\mu\text{g/dL}$.

Despite the declines shown in the chart above, children continue to be exposed to lead. In Rhode Island, children living in the four core cities, where the child poverty rates are highest, are at increased risk for lead exposure because the housing stock tends to be older and they are more likely to be renters.

- **In 2022, 550 (2.5%) of the 24,334 Rhode Island children under age six who were screened had confirmed elevated blood lead levels of ≥ 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$.**
- Children living in the four core cities (3.9%) were more likely than children in the remainder of the state (1.1%) to have confirmed elevated blood lead levels of ≥ 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$.

More effective tools are needed to ensure compliance with efforts that already exist to prevent lead poisoning. Guaranteeing compliance with our lead laws is fundamental to eradicating lead poisoning because it is exceedingly rare for children to be poisoned in homes that are fully compliant with existing law – but compliance must be increased to protect all Rhode Island children. **A comprehensive and strong rental registry for all properties will improve public health and safety, consumer protection, and housing policymaking in our state. A strong rental registry would list all properties, not just ones built before 1978, and also provide information that is accessible and usable for all Rhode Islanders.**

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown in lead poisoning prevention and for the opportunity to provide this testimony.