

EQUITY FOR ALL KIDS

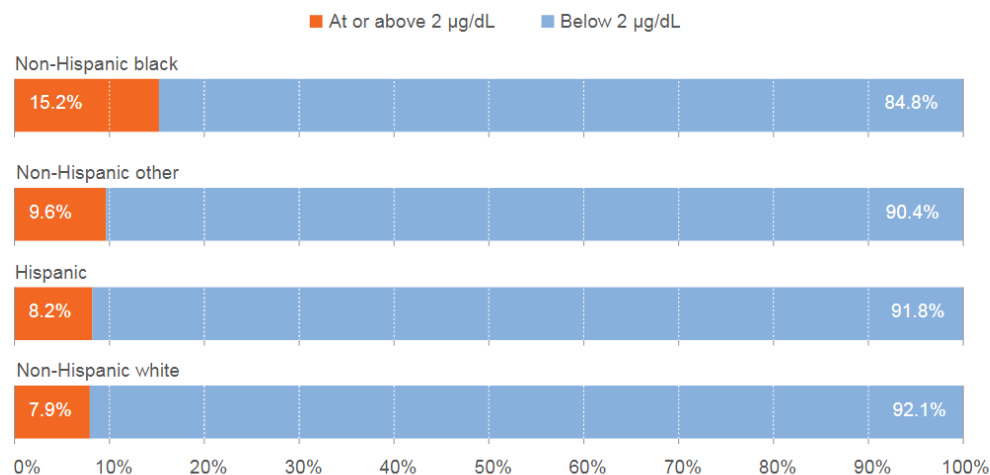


To: Chairs Barve and Clippinger and members of the Environment and Transportation and Judiciary Committees
From: Shamoyia Gardiner, Education Policy Director
Re: House Bill 1542: Baltimore City - Lead Poisoning Testing Program and Lead Poisoning Prevention Fund
Date: March 6, 2020
Position: Support

There is no safe amount of lead in children's blood. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) advises that even one microgram per deciliter of lead is enough to lower an individual's IQ by several points. Sustained exposure to this neurotoxin allows lead to accumulate in the bloodstream, causing a host of negative impacts not limited to: irritability, mood disorders, appetite loss, and developmental delays.¹ Lead poisoning has also been linked to violent crime, as evidenced by longitudinal studies in Flint, Michigan.² As an illustrative point, the presence of **a sugar packet's worth of lead dust in a two-bedroom home is enough to poison a child.**³

Black children are more likely to have higher blood lead levels

Share of children ages 1 to 5 with blood lead levels below and above 2 µg/dL by race and ethnicity, 2011-2014



Source: Altarum analysis of National Center for Health Statistics, "National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 2011-2012," accessed May 26, 2017, [link](#); and National Center for Health Statistics, "National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 2013-2014," accessed May 26, 2017, [link](#)

¹ Centers for Disease Control.

² Zahran et. al. *Four Phases of the Flint Water Crisis: Evidence from Blood Lead Levels in Children*. August, 2017.

³Meier, Helen. Department of Epidemiology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

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Advocates for Children and Youth builds a strong Maryland by advancing policies and programs to ensure children and families of every race, ethnicity, and place of birth achieve their full potential.

An in-depth study revealed that in Detroit, MI environmental lead exposure has resulted in increased risk for: reading difficulties; course failure; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, antisocial behavior, and delinquency. The same investigation found that 38%, 30.1%, and 31.8% of students receiving special educational services had blood lead levels of 5 micrograms/deciliter or less, between 5 and 10 micrograms/deciliter, and more than 10 micrograms/deciliter, respectively.⁴ Indeed, reports of student misbehavior in parts of the state with higher rates of childhood lead exposure is unsurprising.

Children who are lead poisoned are 7 times more likely to drop out of school and 6 times more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system. Given the racial disparities in who experiences lead poisoning, **this is yet another driver of the racial disparities in educational outcomes and criminal justice system involvement.**

Strong correlational data exists to indicate that high blood lead levels in children negatively impact academic outcomes and/or strain schools' operating budgets to provide additional services to students who may not have needed them, had they had not been poisoned. Data also demonstrates higher rates of lead poisoning in children who live in predominantly Black parts of the country like Flint, Detroit, and Baltimore City, as these areas have been created through explicitly racist redlining housing policies. It is not enough to lament the circumstances of hundreds of thousands of children—**it is incumbent upon this body to take action to address the crisis.**

Last year, the General Assembly passed the Lead Reduction and Remediation Act, though this did not guarantee sufficient funding for all affected schools to repair and/or replace lead-contaminated pipes or water outlets. While most schools in Baltimore City have banned drinking from all sinks and water fountains, **519 schools across the state have been found to have elevated levels of lead in the drinking water supply.**⁵

HB 1542 offers an opportunity to take action: this bill establishes the Lead Poisoning Prevention Fund, which utilizes a \$0.25/gallon fee paid by paint manufactures and wholesalers to help providers purchase lead poisoning testing equipment. This bill (as amended by the sponsor) addresses a clear and prevalent barrier to universal lead testing in Baltimore City: by providing testing on-site, health care providers can create an environment which ensures that transportation, working schedules, and other factors don't stop families from getting their children tested for lead poisoning. As early identification is key to early intervention, **ACY strongly urges a favorable report on this bill.**

⁴ Tarr, et. al. *The Effects of Lead Exposure on School Outcomes Among Children Living and Attending Public Schools in Detroit, MI.*

⁵ <http://www.greenandhealthyhomes.org/home-health-hazards/lead>