



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance

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On the ground – and at the table

New York City Environmental Justice Alliance testimony to the NYC Council Committee on Environmental Protection, Committee on Health, & Committee on Housing and Buildings on the City's Enforcement of Existing Lead Laws

September 27, 2018

My name is Jalisa Gilmore and I am here to testify on the City's enforcement of existing lead laws on behalf of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA). Founded in 1991, NYC-EJA is a non-profit citywide membership network linking grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their struggle for environmental justice. NYC-EJA empowers its member organizations to advocate for improved environmental conditions and against inequitable environmental burdens. Through our efforts, member organizations coalesce around specific common issues that threaten the ability of low-income and communities of color to thrive, and coordinate campaigns designed to affect City and State policies – including toxic exposures.

New York City has failed to adequately enforce lead laws to ensure the health and well-being of all New Yorkers. Lead has long been an important public health issue in environmental justice communities. This is more recently demonstrated by the exposure of hundreds of children and adults to high levels of lead in their drinking water in Flint, Michigan – a low income community of color. Children from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color bear the highest burden of lead poisoning in NYC. In children lead can have serious consequences on brain development; resulting in decreased intelligence, behavioral difficulties, and learning problems. At higher levels lead can attack the brain and central nervous system and can even result in death.

Given the serious health effects of lead exposure in children it is troubling how many NYC public schools were found to have high levels of lead from faucets and the initial attempt of the NYC Department of Education to skew the results by performing pre-stagnation flushing. Even more disconcerting is the failure of the New York City Housing Authority to perform lead inspections at their properties and falsely reporting that the inspections were completed.

We would also like to highlight the importance of the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation and the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to conduct soil testing in parks and community gardens given that studies have found lead in produce and soil from community gardens. Furthermore, as we highlighted in our NYC Climate Justice Agenda, we recommend the City prioritize the remediation of lead-contaminated soil in parks and community gardens.

NYC has failed to adequately uphold existing lead protections, NYC-EJA supports the City Council's introduction of these new proposed lead laws. We demand that the City ensure that these laws are adequately enforced and hold those who are required to complete inspections accountable so that the most vulnerable populations in NYC are protected from dangerous levels of lead exposure and the accompanying adverse health effects. NYC-EJA would like to thank the New York City Council for holding this oversight hearing on the City's enforcement of existing lead laws, these proposed rule changes and for the opportunity to testify.