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CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING LEGISLATION PASSES GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Last-minute revisions dilute its probable impact

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HARRISBURG, PA (October 28, 2022) – The Pennsylvania General Assembly passed Senate Bill 522, the “Childhood Blood Lead Test Act,” on October 26, 2022. The bill passed the Senate after it concurred with amendments, previously adopted by the full House of Representatives, which weakened the bill intended to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of children who are exposed to poisonous lead. The legislation now moves to Governor Wolf’s desk for his signature.

Supporters of efforts to eliminate the ongoing scourge of childhood lead poisoning had a mixed reaction regarding the passed legislation. The [Pennsylvania Lead-Free Promise Project](#), consisting of 62 health care, housing, social service, civic, business, municipal, law enforcement, environmental and other organizations, noted its appreciation to the General Assembly for taking up this important issue. At the same time, project partners note that the legislation, as adopted, takes only small first steps in helping to address the problem.

“Disappointingly, the bill was amended in the closing hours of the legislative session to eliminate a provision that health care providers make reasonable efforts to ensure young children receive at least one blood lead test by 24 months, or age 2 through 5 if they have never been tested if they are at risk of lead exposure. Childhood lead paint poisoning is 100% preventable, but children at risk need to be tested early in life to ensure the best possible outcomes if lead exposure has taken place.

“The version passed by the General Assembly stipulates that health care providers consider lead exposure and perform testing according to already-established recommendations, which is a much softer approach compared to what was contained in the proposal prior to it being amended.

“Despite changes to lead testing requirements, advocates note the positive provisions in the legislation including the inclusion of Pennsylvania Department of Health public information campaign to inform parents of young children, as well as physicians and other health care providers, of the need to evaluate children’s risk factors for lead exposure and have children tested for blood lead level as appropriate.

“Additionally, the bill requires health insurers, Medical Assistance (MA), and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to cover at least one blood lead test per pregnancy for women with an identified risk factor and at least one test and a confirmatory test, if indicated, per child under age two. The bill provides that coverage for lead testing is subject to copayment, deductible, and coinsurance provisions to the same extent as other medical services covered by the health insurance policy or government program.”

Lead-Free Promise Project partners praised the leadership of Senator Lisa Baker who introduced the bill along with 12 other cosponsors in 2021. She has been a staunch supporter of the need for stronger action to eliminate childhood lead poisoning. Her persistence in championing this legislation will help drive increased attention to the need to have children tested early to mitigate the lifelong impact of lead poisoning.

“Alerting Pennsylvanians to the hazards of lead exposure is the first step in protecting children from the health and developmental consequences,” said Senator Lisa Baker. “In the next legislative session, a stronger effort must be made to make lead testing available for all children. By the time a child shows signs of exposure to lead, serious damage may have already occurred. Lead poisoning is preventable. Putting testing into law is the best preventive measure.”

Childhood lead exposure, which primarily occurs when children ingest lead paint chips and dust, can seriously harm a young child’s health by causing well-documented effects such as brain and nervous system damage, slowed growth and development, hearing and speech problems, lower IQ, underperformance in school along with behavior and impulse control issues that have been linked to future juvenile and adult crime.

Even though lead paint was banned in 1978, lead poisoning is still far too prevalent across Pennsylvania today, with nearly 8,000 PA children poisoned every year. There is no safe level of lead exposure in children. Pennsylvania ranks 5th in the nation for old housing stock with 70% of residential units built before 1980.

LFPP is part of ThrivingPa.com, a non-partisan, statewide campaign that seeks to improve the quality of and increase equitable access to a coordinated system of health supports, including access comprehensive perinatal health services, children’s health insurance, nutrition supports and lead screening and abatement.

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