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ELEVATE ENERGY
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Testimony for Senate Education Committee Hearing Regarding Early Childhood Education Funding and Access to Early Literacy

September 16, 2020

Dear Chairwoman Bertino-Tarrant, Chairman McGuire, and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding early childhood education funding and access to early literacy. Elevate Energy is an Illinois-based nonprofit. We work on clean energy, workforce, and healthy housing programs and help homeowners, owners of affordable rental apartment buildings, and nonprofit buildings such as child care centers and houses of worship to reduce lead exposure from their buildings.

Elevate Energy educates, advocates for, and mitigates the health impacts of exposure to lead in children. We offer a preventive lead abatement program to eliminate common sources of lead exposure such as lead based paint and contaminated dust in home-based child care facilities occupied by children. We also offer lead in drinking water education, training, and testing services for child care providers throughout the State of Illinois.

Investing in lead poisoning prevention is critical because there is no safe level of lead exposure in children. While lead exposure has health implications for all people, the effects are especially concerning among infants and children under the age of six. Children’s developing bodies absorb more of the lead they are exposed to than their adult counterparts. Exposure—even at low levels—can damage children’s developing brains and nervous systems, contributing to lower IQ, hearing loss, and learning and behavior problems, in and out of the classroom.

Furthermore, lead poisoning disproportionately impacts children along racial and ethnic lines. In the paper, *The Racial Ecology of Lead Poisoning, Toxic Inequality in Chicago Neighborhoods*,¹ researchers examined more than one million blood tests from 1995 to 2013 and found that children from “predominantly black, and to a lesser extent Hispanic, neighborhoods had higher rates of lead poisoning than their white counterparts, even as blood lead levels fell dramatically citywide.”²

¹ Sampson, R., & Winter, A. (2016). THE RACIAL ECOLOGY OF LEAD POISONING: Toxic Inequality in Chicago Neighborhoods, 1995-2013. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 13(2), 261-283. doi:10.1017/S1742058X16000151

² Urahn, S., Coukell, A., Mallya, G., Russo, P., Morley, R., Lenhart, A., Illa, G., Brown, M. J. (2017). *10 Policies to Prevent and Respond to Childhood Lead Exposure*. Health Impact Project, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Increased funding for lead prevention and abatement in Illinois will result in a host of social, health, and economic benefits for current and future generations. Economist Elise Gould conducted a cost benefit analysis on lead hazard control programs and found that each dollar invested in lead hazard control results in a return of \$17 to \$221.³ These benefits include:

- Reduction of attributed healthcare costs
- Increase in a household's lifetime earnings
- Increased tax revenue
- A reduction in the need for special education services, and,
- A reduction in the direct costs of crime.

Specifically, Elevate Energy encourages the Senate Education Committee and State of Illinois to consider the following:

- Increase funding for lead prevention and abatement services for children with elevated blood lead levels. In 2019, new Illinois rules reduced the blood lead action level in children from 10 micrograms per deciliter to 5.⁴ While this new standard positions Illinois as a leader in preventing childhood lead poisoning, it is expected that the number of children referred for nurse case management and environmental assessment services will increase from about 1,000 to 6,000.⁵
- Restart the State of Illinois CLEAR-WIN program (Comprehensive Lead Education and Reduction through Window Replacement). In the past, this program provided window replacements for households with old windows with lead paint. The program was offered to income eligible households with children under the age of six, thereby removing a major source of lead poisoning in children.
- Provide child care facilities with funding to mitigate sources of lead in drinking water. In Illinois, certain child care facilities are required to test their drinking water for lead and mitigate if lead is found. Currently, child care providers do not have access to funding to mitigate sources of lead in drinking water.

Lead poisoning in children is 100 percent preventable, but not unless the State of Illinois takes the necessary steps to fund lead prevention and abatement. We encourage you to support an increase in funding for lead prevention and abatement because all Illinois children deserve to live, learn, and play in lead-free environments supporting lifelong health.

Thank you,



Anne McKibbin
Policy Director

³ Gould, E. (2009). Childhood Lead Poisoning: Conservative Estimates of the Social and Economic Benefits of Lead Hazard Control. *Environmental Health Perspectives*. 117(7), 1162-1167.

⁴ Illinois Department of Public Health (2019). Illinois Department Of Public Health Lead Rules Approved. <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/news/illinois-department-public-health-lead-rules-approved>

⁵ Housing Action Illinois (2019). \$15 Million in FY20 Necessary to Implement New Lead Poisoning Prevention Rules.