



New York's Senator

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SCHUMER ANNOUNCES NEW LEGISLATION TO COMBAT MAJOR LEAD CRISIS IN ROCHESTER; SENATOR SAYS CONGRESS MUST IMMEDIATELY VOTE ON LEAD BILL TO HELP HOMEOWNERS IN ROCHESTER & UPSTATE NY REMOVE HAZARDOUS METAL FROM THEIR HOMES

*Rochester's Housing Stock Is Old – 95% of Housing Units Are Pre-1980 And
Could Contain Lead Paint*

*Schumer Will Also Announces Push to Increase Funding for HUD Lead
Hazard Control Program Grant Program; Funding Has Plummeted Since
2003*

*Schumer: Bill Will Provide Emergency Federal Tax Credits to Help
Homeowners Get The Lead Out*

U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer today announced new legislation that will directly address the persistent lead problem in Rochester. Schumer said federal funding for lead poisoning prevention and remediation has plummeted and Congress must act fast to both restore historic funding levels and to pass his legislation to reduce the cost of removing lead from homes.

Schumer said that, despite all the progress made in Rochester to decrease the percentage of kids with lead poisoning, based on the most recent Monroe County Health Department's 2014 data compiled by the Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning, 470 Monroe County children tested were found with blood-lead levels of 5-9 micrograms per deciliter, which is associated with permanent neurological damage and behavioral disorders, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The CDC says even low blood lead levels are a major concern for children under 6 years of age because their brains are not fully developed and are sensitive to lead exposure. An additional 139 children living in Monroe County were

found with blood-lead levels at or above 10 micrograms per deciliter. So despite the successful work over the past decade by officials with the Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning, Monroe County, and the City of Rochester to reduce the number of children with at least 10 micrograms per deciliter from a high in 2003 of 900 children to only 139 children in 2014, the number of children now known to have between 5-9 micrograms underscores the continued need to bolster lead hazard abatement efforts.

“Lead poisoning is an irreversible, preventable tragedy that robs many families and children of their future. We need to do everything we can to eliminate this hazardous lead from Rochester and Monroe County homes, which are vulnerable because so many were built before 1980,” said **Schumer**. “This new \$3000 homeowner tax credit and critical increase in federal investments will help more families and communities get the lead out. That is why, next week, I am introducing a bill to finally give families, eligible landlords and homeowners with a \$3,000 tax credit for to help cover the cost of removing lead hazards in their homes. We need to act now and we need to act fast to get toxic lead out of our homes, before it is too late.” Schumer noted that the tax credit would include those with household incomes up to \$110,000.

“Homeowners need new tools like this \$3,000 tax credit to increase awareness about possible hazards and to encourage them to make their homes healthier and safer,” said **Elizabeth McDade, Program Manager of the Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning, McDade**. “The Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning fully supports Senator Schumer’s bill and we are extraordinarily grateful for his continued work to push for increases in this year’s budget for lead poisoning prevention initiatives. If the situation in Flint has taught us anything, it has proven that increasing funding for the HUD Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes is absolutely vital to keep families safe from the devastating effects of lead poisoning.”

The CDC has recently revealed that half a million U.S. children ages 1-5 have blood-lead levels above 5 micrograms per deciliter, which is the level at which the CDC recommends public health actions be initiated. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), lead is much more harmful to children than adults because it can affect children’s developing nerves and brains. Lead-based paint – which still encases the walls in older homes that were built when the substance was widely used – often erodes and settles on everything from food on a table, to children’s toys on the floor. This then easily allows the substance to get into the hands and mouths of children. In addition, many older homes contain pipes made with lead. Many plumbing fixtures, such as spigots and faucets, were allowed to be manufactured with lead levels above 8 percent before 2014. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 10-20 percent of the lead that poisons children comes from tap water. And according to a recent report from the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, while the vast majority of lead poison cases in the Rochester region is the result of lead paint exposure, lead has contaminated tap water in some Rochester homes.

According to the National Center for Healthy Housing, childhood exposure to lead has lifelong consequences, including decreased IQ and cognitive function, developmental delays and behavioral problems. Very high levels of lead exposure can cause seizures, coma and even death. Some health organizations argue, like the National Center for Environmental Health, in a 2012 study. For this reason, Schumer said it is disturbing that, according to the report from the *Democrat and Chronicle*, 95 percent of all housing units in Rochester were built before 1980 and could therefore contain lead. According to the report, roughly 7.4 percent of children ages 1-6 tested in the city were determined to have lead poisoning. The parallel figure for children ages 1-6 in the City of Flint, Michigan was 3.9 percent poisoned.

Schumer said that the federal government has been able to better protect communities and children in the Rochester area from lead poisoning by providing roughly \$28 million in U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Lead Hazard Control & Healthy Home grant funding to the City of Rochester and Monroe County in past years. However, overall federal funding to address this problem has plummeted and lead exposure remains a persistent problem in Monroe County and Rochester. According to the Monroe County Department of Public Health's most recent data, the number of children diagnosed with blood-lead levels above 10 micrograms per deciliter has decreased from 900 in 2004 to 139 in 2014. However, in 2014, 470 children were reported with elevated blood-lead levels between 5-9 micrograms per deciliter – which is now what the CDC considers the intervention threshold – making a total of 609 children in Monroe County considered “lead poisoned.” This data found that 4.6 percent of children (aged 1-6) screened had blood lead levels of 5 micrograms per deciliter or higher. 4.6 percent of children aged 1-6 in Monroe County is about 1,900 children, according to Census data.

As a result, Schumer launched a two-pronged plan to combat lead poisoning in Rochester and across Upstate New York. First, Schumer will soon be introducing legislation aimed at providing federal tax credits to help homeowners and communities get lead out of their housing units. Schumer, alongside Senator Sheldon Whitehouse [D-RI], will be introducing a bill next week that would do the following:

- Provide tax credits to eligible homeowners and landlords, which would allow them to cover up to 50 percent of the costs of removing lead in homes;
 - This includes an up to \$3,000 tax credit for getting rid of lead pipes, lead paint and replacing painted surfaces, windows or fixtures contaminated with lead paint;
 - It also includes an up to \$1,000 tax credit for specialized cleaning, temporary containment, monitoring and resident education about lead paint contamination.
- This tax credit would be fully refundable and amendable against prior year returns, so the value can be claimed quickly;
- Includes the replacement of lead pipes among the hazard mitigation efforts that would qualify for this tax credit;
- The tax credit would be available to all households earning up to \$110,000 per year;
- The previous 2009 version of this legislation only allowed households with a child under 6 years of age or a household with a woman about to bear a child and that was built before 1960 to claim the credit.

As the second part of his effort, Schumer is pushing federal appropriators to increase funding for HUD's Lead Hazard Control & Healthy Home grant program, which has been consistently shortchanged over the last several years. The Lead Hazard Control & Healthy Home grant program received its highest level of funding in 2003, at \$176 million, but it has seen significant declines ever since. Since FY 2014, the program has only received \$110 million and the President's Proposed FY17 Budget released earlier this month again calls for it to be funded at only the \$110 million level. Schumer said beginning this year, it is critical to reverse this declining funding trend and move back to the program's higher historic funding levels. He said this is particularly important, as the findings of the Presidential Lead Commission a decade ago said it would take \$230 million per year, over a 10-year period, to clean up the worst houses. Many of these homes were built before 1960 and in the neighborhoods with the most need. Schumer is therefore urging federal appropriators to increase funding for the HUD program, up to the \$230 million level.

Right now, Monroe County and the City of Rochester are taking advantage of HUD's federal grant program to remediate 270 housing units and 235 units respectively in the Rochester area, at an average of \$11,000 per unit. Schumer said that while Monroe County and the City of Rochester have enough to cover the remediation of these 505 rental units over a 3-year period for units inhabited by low-income residents, this needs to be sustained through increased federal funding levels because the County and the City must continue to re-apply and compete for a share of HUD's Lead Hazard Control & Healthy Home Grant. If overall funding for HUD Lead Hazard Control & Healthy Home Grant program continues to shrink, there will be less funding available to sustain these local low-income grant programs.

Schumer announced his push at the home of Ms. Elizabeth Gilliam-Mayo, Rochester Homeowner who was able to remove lead paint hazards in her home thanks to a federal HUD Lead Hazard Control & Healthy Home Grant provided through Monroe County last year. Ms. Gilliam-Mayo, who provides day care services from her home, used the funding to hire a local EPA Lead-Safe Certified contractors to replace the home's hazardous lead-painted windows and abate lead paint found on the homes exterior and porches.

Schumer said the \$3000 tax credit created by his legislation would complement the existing grant program used homeowners like Ms. Gilliam-Mayo, to reach more homeowners and encourage them to replace windows with lead paint, doors with lead paint and other lead paint hazards. Finally, Schumer said addressing these housing-related health hazards makes economic sense, as every \$1 spent to reduce home lead hazards provides a benefit of at least \$17.

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