



## **NYS Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Housing**

**February 2, 2021**

**Testimony of Rebecca Garrard,  
Campaigns Manager for Housing Justice,  
Citizen Action of New York**

I would first like to thank Senate Finance Chair Liz Krueger and Assembly Ways and Means Chair Helene Weinstein for holding today's hearing.

Today you will hear and have already heard vital testimony on the housing budgetary needs in this state. These will include the formation of a landlord hardship fund to address the rental crisis within this state, deep investment in supportive housing and public housing, the allotment of significant resources towards the creation of social housing programs such as community land trusts, residential cooperatives, and programs which give tenants the resources and right of purchase when their buildings go up for sale. All of these are crucial in this moment, and could and should be funded through raising revenue on the wealthiest New Yorkers as outlined in the platform of the Invest in Our New York coalition. However, I am going to speak to a different revenue need which you may not be brought up in other testimony today. I want to testify about the need for this budget

to finally invest in ending the crisis of lead poisoning that exists across our state.

New York State has a higher number of children who test positive for lead poisoning than any other state in this country, even though only about a third of the children in this state are even tested for lead exposure. Many upstate counties have children that test positive for lead poisoning at rates as much as 5 to 10 times higher than the children in Flint, MI during the height of their crisis. A study published in the Journal of Pediatrics showed that between 2009 and 2015, children in the city of Syracuse had the highest percentage of children with lead poisoning in the nation, and Buffalo and Poughkeepsie join Syracuse in ranking in the top 6 cities in the country with the highest percentages of children with lead poisoning. In certain Syracuse zip codes, where residents are almost exclusively Black and brown, approximately 1 in 4 children test positive for lead poisoning. Make no mistake, that profile is mirrored in every impacted city. Communities of color are significantly disproportionately affected by this crisis.

The impacts of lead poisoning are irreversible and not limited to health implications. They also cause learning disabilities, behavioral disorders, and a variety of other consequences which negatively impact the quality of life and potential for our children who have been exposed to lead. Families who already struggle, through no fault of their own, with the burdens of poverty and racist socioeconomic systems, are further abused by our state when the only housing they have access to is poisoning their children through lead contaminated paint, dust, and water. It is well past time that New York address this travesty through devoting resources to ensure that all of our children have access to safe and healthy homes. Thank you all for your consideration of this testimony.