
Obama, Clinton Introduce Legislation to Get Dangerous Lead Out of Child Care Facilities

Tuesday, October 3, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Date: October 3, 2006

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Estimated that 14 Percent of Child care Facilities Contain Toxic Lead

WASHINGTON - U.S. Senators Barack Obama (D-IL) and Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) today said that they have introduced legislation that would help protect children from lead poisoning by requiring that all non-home-based child care facilities, including Head Start program locations and kindergarten classrooms, be lead-safe within five years. The legislation would establish a \$42.6 million grant program to help local communities pay to make these facilities safe.

"For decades, we've known that lead is poisonous to young children, but 30 years after we banned lead from paint, millions of children are still at risk when they're in day care or at school," said Obama. "This legislation will make sure that our kids are protected from lead, and that local communities have the funding they need to make sure these facilities are safe."

"It is critical that we remove lead hazards where our children live, learn and play. We know that lead poisoning can devastate our children's ability to learn, grow and develop and we need to eliminate these risks and hazards that continue to persist in child care facilities and schools. New York City and Rochester have been at the forefront of grassroots efforts to combat lead poisoning, and this bill would provide important resources and incentives to implement lead prevention programs nationwide," said Senator Clinton.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, about 310,000 children nationwide have toxic lead levels in their blood, with poor and minority children disproportionately at risk. The problem of lead contamination is especially great in the Midwest and Northeast where 40 percent of child care centers were built prior to 1960.

Illinois has the highest lead poisoning rate in the nation. According to an Illinois Department of Public Health report, Illinois amounted to 20.5 percent of all elevated blood levels reported nationwide. The report also found that African-American children are more than three times as likely to suffer from elevated lead levels and Hispanic children are more than twice as likely to suffer from elevated lead levels.

Each year in New York State, an additional 10,000 children under the age of six are newly identified as having elevated blood lead levels, and over 200,000 children in New York have had documented lead poisoning between 1992 and 2004. Exposure to lead results in increased expenses each year for New York in the form of special education and other education expenses; medical care for lead-poisoned children; and expenditures for delinquent youth and other needing special supervision. It is estimated that these increased expenses, as well as lost earnings, exceed \$4 billion annually.

The Lead Poisoning Reduction Act of 2006 requires all non-home-based child care facilities to be certified lead-safe in five years. It establishes a five-year, \$42.6 million grant program to help communities reduce lead exposure in day care centers, Head Start programs and kindergartens. It also establishes best practices for communities to test for and reduce lead hazards.

Lead paint in older buildings is a primary source of exposure, but significant lead exposure can also come from tap water. Lead is rarely found in the source water used for public water supplies, but more commonly enters tap

water as a result of corrosion of water lines, pipes, and household plumbing. Lead in drinking water can be a significant source of lead exposure, and can account for as much as 60 percent of the exposure for infants and children who consume formula and concentrated juices. Children suffer the greatest negative health impacts, since lead adversely impacts physical and mental development, decreased intelligence, behavioral problems, and can also lead to kidney damage, anemia, reproductive disorders, seizures, coma, and even death.

Nearly 12 million children under age 5 spend 40 hours a week in child care. An estimated 14 percent of licensed child care centers nationwide are contaminated with hazardous levels of lead-based paint, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. A recent report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) identified significant, systemic problems with the way in which the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) monitors and regulates the levels of lead in our nation's drinking water including a complete lack of reliable data on which to make assessments and decisions. The GAO study found that few schools and child care facilities nationwide have tested their water for lead and no focal point exists at either the national or state level to collect and analyze test results. Few states have comprehensive programs to detect and remediate lead in drinking water at schools and child care facilities.

In June, in response to the GAO report, Senators Obama and Clinton joined with Senators Jim Jeffords, Joe Lieberman, Frank Lautenberg and Barbara Boxer in sending a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson calling on the agency to come clean on its methods for testing nationwide lead levels in drinking water and to immediately implement the GAO report's recommendations, including updating EPA's 1994 guidance on lead in drinking water in schools and non-residential buildings.