



**TO: Assembly Committee on Energy & Utilities**  
**FROM: Heather Paradis, MD, Medical Director, Community Services, Children's Wisconsin**  
**DATE: Tuesday, February 4, 2020**  
**RE: Support for AB 475 & AB 476—School and child care lead testing**

Good afternoon, Chairman Kuglitsch and members of the committee. My name is Dr. Heather Paradis and I am a practicing pediatrician and the Medical Director of Community Services at Children's Wisconsin (Children's). Thank you for holding this hearing today and allowing me this opportunity to testify today in support of both AB 475 and AB 476 regarding school and child care lead testing.

As many of you know, Children's is the state's only independent health care system dedicated solely to the health and well-being of children. We serve children and families in every county across the state, with inpatient hospitals in Milwaukee and the Fox Valley and more than 30 primary, specialty and urgent care clinics. We care for every part of a child's health, from critical care to routine checkups, and focusing on all aspects of pediatric well-being by providing a multitude of ancillary services and programs.

Lead remains a significant public health issue in our communities across the state. Despite great public health gains in childhood lead poisoning throughout the late 1970s to early 2000s, recent progress has plateaued despite increasing evidence that even low levels of exposure cause lifelong harm. As a primary care pediatrician, I see firsthand the effects lead poisoning can have on a child's health and well-being, including learning difficulties, developmental delays and behavioral issues. There is no "natural" level of lead that comes from our diet or nature; therefore, any detectable level of lead in a person's bloodstream is there as environmental contamination. When it comes to lead and children, no level can be considered "safe." While much of Wisconsin's lead poisoning continues to stem from degrading paint sources, efforts to protect our water supply and identify other potential significant sources of lead on a case-by-case basis are critical to reducing incidence of this harmful condition.

At Children's, we are dedicated to providing the best care for children and we have implemented measures to increase testing and identification of children in need of care. We follow Wisconsin Lead Poisoning Prevention Program guidelines and recommendations for testing, including enhanced testing for children who live in areas with elevated lead poisoning risk, including children covered by Medicaid and those residing in the cities of Milwaukee and Racine. We have equipped each of our Primary Care sites with point-of-care instruments, so lead results are immediately known and shared with both families and the local health department at the time of testing. Lead testing compliance is one of our internal quality metrics for Primary Care, Children's Community Health Plan and the Care4Kids program serving children in out-of-home care. Unfortunately, Children's continues to see far too many children who are hospitalized for chelation therapy due to lead poisoning. This is an issue that we can't ignore, and that needs continued focus and attention to address.

Eliminating the lead risk in our community will continue to take committed and coordinated action by community, health and government entities. We are thankful that city and state officials are looking at this as a public health issue and we encourage and support focused efforts and resources on lead poisoning prevention, including increased testing efforts. AB 475 and AB 476 put in place a process for our schools and child care settings to test water sources for lead. Implementing standardized lead testing and remediation at locations where children spend much of their time will help prevent lead

poisoning among children. While we can treat children for lead poisoning, the effects can have long-lasting impacts on a child's life which is why preventing lead poisoning is so critical.

Our children face so many potential threats to health and well-being during the first years of life – years that are foundational to their growth and development. Lead exposure is one threat that we have the ability to control and to mitigate the risks. Identifying and removing sources of lead is crucial to preventing the harmful effects of lead poisoning.

Chairman Kuglitsch and committee members, I thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of AB 475 and AB 476. Children's is glad to serve as a resource on this important public health matter facing our state, and in particular, our most vulnerable community members. I am happy to answer any questions now.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns after the hearing, please feel free to contact me via email at [hparadis@chw.org](mailto:hparadis@chw.org) or via phone at 414-337-6916.

*As you know, Children's Wisconsin (Children's) serves children and families in every county across the state. We have inpatient hospitals in Milwaukee and the Fox Valley. We care for every part of a child's health, from critical care at one of our hospitals, to routine checkups in our primary care clinics. Children's Hospital also provides specialty care, urgent care, emergency care, dental care, school health nurses, foster care and adoption services, family resource centers, child health advocacy, health education, family preservation and support, mental health services, pediatric medical research and the statewide poison hotline.*