

Comments of Eliza Rakaseder

Vermont Legal Aid

House General and Housing

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Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for granting the opportunity to speak on behalf of H.184 and its significance to the health and wellbeing of Vermont residents.

My name is Eliza Rakaseder. I am a senior at the University Vermont, as well as an intern for Vermont legal Aid. I am studying Environmental Studies and have studied environmental hazards extensively throughout my academic career. This is why I feel strongly about communicating the truth and dangers of lead paint poisoning. Lead paint is an invisible danger, often overlooked by landlords and contractors. Mishandling such a potent hazard can lead to serious health implications, especially in children. In earlier decades, the fear of children eating lead laced paint chips was the main concern for exposure. Today, it is more commonly ingested through microscopic dust that can easily contaminate our air, water, and soil quality if not properly managed.

I am also a resident of Burlington. I want to highlight that lead paint poisoning is commonly sourced in older homes and buildings. Burlington consists of many older structures, posing a

higher risk of lead dust coming off the exterior of buildings. It is most dangerous on surfaces subject to high wear and tear, such as windowsills doors, and porches. Houses built before 1977 are 24% more likely to contain lead paint, and those built before 1940 are 87% more likely to contain it. Most buildings located in the Old North End date to the late 1800s, and some as late as 1970. Inadvertently disturbing large amounts of lead dust in a densely populated area like the Old North End spreads invisible toxic dust into playgrounds, homes, and surrounding businesses. It is important to avoid this as much as possible.

Many contractors and maintenance workers who have backgrounds in construction may believe they know all about the dangers and precautions necessary for working with lead paint, while some refuse to deal with it altogether. Regardless of their position, lead paint is a serious health hazard and should be taken seriously. Millions of children are affected by lead paint poisoning with some level of irreversible damage to development. New cases of childhood lead poisoning are diagnosed daily, and many go unreported. According to the [Vermont Department of Health](#), in Vermont alone, about 600 one- and two-year-olds a year have elevated levels of lead in their blood. It can be estimated that about 5% of children who are tested had lead levels over 5 mcg/dl which is beyond the healthy limit for children. Adults exposed to lead paint can also suffer from high blood pressure, headaches, and motor skills if ingested. Even small levels of lead exposure can cause irrevocable harm. An important thing to note is it is not just lead paint chips that poison, but contamination from tiny amounts of dust absorbed by anyone who inhales or ingests it.

From my understanding of H.184, property owners can already do maintenance work and minor repairs without needing to be certified. My concern is about when those repairs will become a larger project. If a landlord is going to be disturbing more than a foot of paint or replacing windows, I recommend it be required that repairs be handled by a professional contractor who is properly Lead-Safe Certified, or it be required that landlords receive Lead-Safe Certification.

There is already an exception in the law to allow landlords to do maintenance routines and minor repairs without being licensed, however, when dealing with more severe renovations involving older infrastructure, certified professionals should take the lead. This is to avoid the unintentional disturbance of large amounts of lead dust which can contaminate not just the owner's building, but neighboring buildings and areas as well.

We need more widespread regard for lead paint compliance because lead exposure is extremely dangerous. It is of paramount importance that we create a mechanism to handle more serious and hazardous cases, such as professional protocol and in-depth check-ins with landlords to ensure the health and safety of Vermont residents. One poisoned, exposure is for life and cannot be reversed.