

Lead And Politics

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JACKSON, MI - An ordinance change that could cost landlords \$500 per property (more likely \$500 per unit) wasn't addressed by the Jackson City Council at its Jan. 30 meeting, but will resurface, Mayor Derek Dobies said.

The change would force landlords with properties built before 1978 to have a lead risk assessment performed by a licensed lead inspector or assessor, with the results going to occupants and the city.

While on the agenda Jan. 30, council balked at considering it during the four-hour meeting. "There was a lot on the agenda and we also had a lot of people that were feeling under the weather and had a lot of different balls in the air," Dobies said. "It didn't get voted down (that) night, it died for a lack of second."

Dobies wants it passed soon, though, he said. It wouldn't go into effect until Dec. 31, the ordinance states. "We have to do something," Dobies said. "It's because of the lead paint problem that we have. A lot of the homes that were built prior to 1978 have lead paint in them."

In true Dobies fashion, the issue is not lead poisoning in children but grandstanding to get his name in the news. The city claims it has an obligation to protect the safety and welfare of its citizens, particularly children. While this is an admirable goal, why does it only apply to children living in rentals? When a family living in a rental buys the home they are living in, because it is now owner occupied, why is it no longer subject to the invasive inspection requirements aimed at protecting the children? Once a child moves from a rental, are they no longer worthy of the city imposed protections the city is obligated to provide? This different treatment of children reeks of disparate impact and the potential subject of a civil rights suit against the city.

Lets take a step back and look at the root cause of the problem. Lead paint was used throughout homes built before 1959 and still in use when it was banned in 1978. Other sources of lead included tetra-ethyl lead used in gasoline to prevent knocking and is various other industrial processes including the manufacture of tire and much more so in lead-acid batteries used in cars. Lead is everywhere in the environment due to its widespread use. Just today I was reading a label on an electrical product manufactured in China. It carried a warning about washing hands thoroughly after touching the wires as the insulation contains lead. 2018 and still with us.

Why has it become such a "problem" when most of us older folks were raised in lead filled homes and in a lead filled environment with do discernible learning and behavior problems which are currently being blamed on lead exposure particularly in rental properties allegedly not maintained by landlords.

I was raised in rental properties in the 40's and 50's. I am sure that those properties were filled with lead paint and sliding windows and slamming doors released lead dust just as it supposedly does today.

What could possibly be the difference? How about a mother that didn't drop out of school at 14 to bear the first of 5 kids destined for the welfare roles. My single mother saw education as a key to the future for her children and spent endless hours reading and teaching her children and opposed to neglecting her children's physical need for wholesome food and a wholesome environment.

I have seen firsthand how many low income mothers treat their children in psychologically damaging manners and rely on junk food to keep them quiet and make them fat. Landlords in Jackson encounter this every day.

The rise in learning and behavioral problems parallels the rise in the "poverty class" foisted on us by LBJ and the "Great Society". We could ignore these problems but these are serious issues and must be addressed.

Dobies and the self serving governmental bureaucrats would have us believe these problems are all the fault of landlords and it is they who should pay dearly. They neglect the impact of the lead dust spread through the city demolitions of condemned houses, a serious threat in all older urban area,

Dobies sees this as a source of publicity and another steppingstone to higher office. The bureaucrats see it as bread and butter.

I was reviewing the forms submitted to the Michigan Dept of Community Health by doctors and other "health professionals", On the form was a block to check : Owner Occupied v Rental. There were check off for race/ethnicity and source of funds for the lead screening.

I noted that on the reports produced by the MDCH, there was no breakdown in the reports listing Blood Lead Levels (BLL) in owner-occupied v rentals or any of the other categories on the form.

There is no breakdown listing elevated BLL v income, race, parental age, one or two parent household or any of the factors that may contribute to elevated BLL's and the supposed results: Behavioral and Learning problems.

I sent an FOIA asking for the BLL reports broken down by the different parameters collected. I was told they don't do that. They don't use the information on the forms in analyzing results. We know why that is.

They do not want to know the truth because if they accepted the truth and wanted to confront the real problems, it will not be forcing landlords to spend thousands of dollars on abatement but forcing negligent parents to take care of their kids and feed them a healthy diet. Criminal prosecution for child neglect is the solution. Lead assessment and possible prosecution of landlords will not solve the problem.

What I am suggesting is that if the children in rentals must be protected because of the "environment (lead paint)" and the children in owner occupied (which also have lead paint) need not be protected, the variable causing the elevated BLL's must not be the lead paint but the environment provided by negligent parent(s) and that is what must be addressed,

So what are our choices? Given that the Dobies regime and "Clear Curt Burtch have ill intentions toward landlords, it is only fair to fight back with our maximum effort using all the tools at our disposal.

A class action suit claiming disparate impact is sure to rile the opposition at city hall and is worthy of the necessary groundwork early on.

The following links provide references to research and publications covering the various aspects of the lead exposure issues.