



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER  
SCOTT M. STRINGER

September 27, 2019

**By Electronic Mail**

The Honorable Bill de Blasio  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Lead Investigation**

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

I am writing to follow up on a recent investigative report my office released that examined the City's approach to eradicating lead poisoning, particularly that caused by housing conditions. As I am sure you would agree, any child who is exposed to high levels of lead is a tragedy, which is why it is so important that we as a city do everything in our power to address lead in our buildings in a manner that is coordinated, pro-active and effective. Unfortunately, the results of our recent investigation suggest that the City's approach has been anything but.

In sum, our investigation revealed a clear failure by the City to leverage its own data related to lead exposure and utilize that data to precisely and methodically inspect buildings and areas most likely to pose a threat to children. Specifically, the Comptroller's Office found that for years the City allowed crucial data — namely thousands of children's blood lead test results collected by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) — to remain siloed within DOHMH, rather than using the data to proactively pinpoint lead exposure hotspots for inspection by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). Instead, the City allowed HPD to rely almost exclusively on a reactive, complaint-driven inspection protocol, all but ignoring the hard, actionable data in possession of a sister agency.

The result is that during the period examined by our investigation — from January 1, 2013 through October 10, 2018 — 9,671 buildings under HPD jurisdiction, housing 11,972 children diagnosed with lead exposure (5 mcg/dL or greater), were not inspected by HPD lead inspectors. Indeed, HPD did not send lead inspectors to 503 buildings under its jurisdiction that DOHMH data showed had *three or more children* with blood levels at or above the 5 mcg/dL, which for years has been the action level recommended by the federal Center for Disease Control.

In response to our report, City Hall officials have vaguely affirmed that they've begun the process of inspecting buildings associated with high levels of lead exposure, but to date no real details have been provided. This is unacceptable, given the grave risk that lead paint poses to children. City agencies have all the information they need *today* to proactively inspect all buildings associated with documented instances of lead exposure, and they should do so, without delay. These inspections should begin with an aggressive timetable for first inspecting the 503 buildings where records show three or more children are living with registered blood levels higher than the City's current, 5mcg/dL action level.

In light of this information, pursuant to the Comptroller's authority under Section 93 of the New York City Charter, the Office of the New York City Comptroller respectfully requests that you direct DOHMH, HPD and any other relevant city agency to provide the following information:

- I. Of the 9,671 buildings where the City's own data show high levels of lead exposure in the period studied, please provide the addresses of all those buildings that have now been inspected by HPD for lead paint. Likewise, please provide a summary of remediation efforts that have been undertaken in each building as a result of those inspections.
- II. For the 503 buildings where records show more than three lead exposed children have resided, please provide an explicit timeframe by which you intend to inspect and remediate those buildings. Please include any efforts undertaken to inspect not just those units where lead exposed children have been identified, but how the City is working to inspect *every unit* in these and other buildings where lead is likely prevalent.
- III. One of the findings of our report is that while Local Law 1 mandates that landlords take proactive measures to prevent lead poisoning, the City has failed to use its statutory authority to enforce compliance. Indeed, over the period studied in this report, we found that the City had issued *zero violations* for failure to enforce the turnover requirements and *zero violations* for failing to perform mandated annual inspections by landlords. Please provide my office with any record of HPD enforcement of these critical provisions since October 10, 2018.

For each item, if DOHMH or HPD does not have the information requested, please so state in the response and provide the reason. In addition, when responding to this letter, please state the item number above (I – III) to which the information relates. Finally, to further this inquiry, we would appreciate your acknowledging receipt of this request and advising us of your designated liaison who will facilitate the Department's response to the Comptroller's Office.

I would be grateful if you could direct that the requested information be provided by October 4, 2019. Thank you in advance for your time and attention to this matter, and we look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,



Scott M. Stringer  
New York City Comptroller

Cc: Commissioner Louise Carroll, Department of Housing Preservation & Development  
Commissioner Oxiris Barbot, MD, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
Commissioner Kathryn Garcia, Department of Sanitation