



**Mount
Sinai** *Children's
Environmental
Health Center*

**FUNDING THE NEW YORK STATE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE IN
CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

**Testimony of the
MOUNT SINAI CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CENTER**

January 27, 2014

PHILIP J. LANDRIGAN, MD, MSc
Professor and Chair
Department of Community and Preventive Medicine
Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

GEOFFREY A. COLLINS, MD
Fellow
Pediatric Environmental Health
Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

MAIDA P. GALVEZ, MD, MPH
Associate Professor
Departments of Pediatrics and Preventive Medicine
Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

PERRY E. SHEFFIELD, MD, MPH
Assistant Professor
Departments of Pediatrics and Preventive Medicine
Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

Dear Chairmen DeFrancisco, Farrell, Gottfried and Hannon and committee members,

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute testimony to this hearing.

We represent pediatricians at the Mount Sinai Children's Environmental Health Center. Our team of health professionals is dedicated to preventing and treating children's diseases of environmental origin across New York State.

We are writing to ask for an appropriation of \$1 million to be added to the state budget in support of re-establishing the New York State Centers of Excellence in Children's Environmental Health. This appropriation is also proposed in legislation introduced by Assemblyman Sweeney and Senator Grisanti: A-7885/S-6166,

This network represents the first of its kind in the country—a groundbreaking initiative to protect New York State's children and ensure the health of the generations to come.

The rationale for these Centers is threefold:

I. The Magnitude of the Problem

Chronic diseases—autism, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), asthma, cancer, birth defects and obesity—have risen to alarming rates in New York State over the past 40 years. There is a strong and growing body of evidence indicating that hazardous exposures in the environment are important causes of these chronic diseases,

At least 475,000 children in New York State currently suffer from asthma. Air pollution is a major contributor.

More than 180,000 of New York's children have a learning disability and more than 660,000 have a developmental or behavioral disorder (including autism, ADHD and mental retardation). Lead, mercury, pesticides, chemicals in plastics, PCBs are among the known environmental causes.

Each year more than 17 million pounds of pesticides are applied across New York State. Pesticides cause acute poisonings and are also linked to learning disabilities and childhood cancer.

In New York State there are 87 federal and over 800 state-designated Superfund sites. The toxic chemicals in these sites threaten the health of children in all areas of the State.

2. The Cost of the Problem

Chronic diseases of environmental origin are extremely costly. We estimate that the full costs in New York State are \$4.35 billion each year. These costs fall on the State's Medicaid budget, but also on the budgets of other Departments, notably Education and Corrections as children who have been damaged in early life by environmental exposures grow up to become difficult students and then criminal adults. Additionally, the incremental losses in school achievement and intelligence result in profound deficits in earnings over these children's lifespans.

3. The Good News

Chronic diseases of environmental origin in children are preventable. We have successfully done this for childhood lead poisoning and for certain pesticide exposures. We are beginning to reduce air pollution and thus control childhood asthma. But we still have much to do.*

Each Center of Excellence will be staffed by a multidisciplinary team consisting of pediatricians, nurses, social workers and environmental specialists. Each will be supported within an academic health center to benefit from the strengths of each institution. The Centers' dual mission will be to treat children who have been injured by environmental exposures and to educate health professionals, teachers, parents, community groups and policy makers about environmental threats to children's health.

At full capacity, this network will also be able to collaborate on research to better characterize environmental hazards, and develop programs to reduce those hazards in homes and communities. The Centers' ultimate goal is to prevent disease of environmental origin in New York's children.

If these Centers succeed in preventing just 1-2% of the diseases of environmental origin that afflict New York's children, *they would prevent \$40-80 million in medical and other costs annually.* Compared to a \$1 million start-up request, they will pay for themselves many times over and make New York an even better place to live and to raise families.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony at this important hearing. We would be more than happy to answer any questions you have.

Children's Environmental Health Center • info@cehccenter.org • (212) 824-7125

*The full data supporting these statements is to be found in the report:
New York State's Children and the Environment (goo.gl/5eh3qC)
