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Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal, New York Communities for Change and New York Lawyers for the Public Interest Call for the NYC Department of Education to Take Effective Action to Remove Toxic PCBs from New York City's Classrooms

Borough President Diaz and Assemblymember Rosenthal Join NYLPI, Parents, Teachers, SEIU 32BJ, Nos Quedamos and New York Communities for Change on Steps of NYC Department of Education

New York, NY, September 2, 2010 – Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. and Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal joined New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, SEIU 32BJ, New York Communities for Change, Nos Quedamos and a number of parents and teachers from New York City public schools on the steps of the NYC Department of Education yesterday afternoon and called for the DOE to take immediate and effective action to remove toxic PCBs from New York City's classrooms.

The call for action came on the heels of the results of a pilot study undertaken by the DOE and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to determine the amount of toxic PCB chemicals in five New York City public schools. The results from the first three schools, released recently, found elevated levels of toxic PCBs in all three--one in the Bronx, one in Brooklyn and one in Manhattan. The levels of the dangerous chemical were above the safety limits set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

"While we are happy that testing and remediation efforts have begun at the pilot study schools, the elevated levels of PCBs found in the pilot schools indicate just how much more work we have to do on a city-wide basis. For the safety of our children all public schools that were built when PCBs were commonly used in construction must be tested for this dangerous chemical and remediated to eliminate risk of exposure, and I am calling on the City, State and Federal government to join together and find the funding to protect the health of our most vulnerable," said Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.

Studies have shown associations between children's exposure to low levels of PCBs and leukemia, disturbance of immune function, and reduced IQ. Such studies have also linked low exposure levels in adults with attentional deficiencies, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and hypertension.

"Since PCBs were discovered in P.S. 199 my district, I have worked to mitigate the danger this poses to our students, teachers and workers," said Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal. "PCBs in ballasts in light fixtures are a tremendous risk for students citywide, and I will soon introduce legislation requiring testing to ensure this danger is removed from the classroom."

“The DOE has done a decent job responding to the troubling results found in the three pilot study schools, but these results show that efforts need to be made citywide to identify schools where children are being exposed to these incredibly harmful chemicals,” said Miranda Massie of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. “Kids can’t wait for a long dragged-out process in light of these alarming results. Every school at risk for PCB contamination needs to be tested as soon as possible.”

“New York Communities for Change works with communities that have been plagued by cancer, asthma and developmental problems in our children for years. We are not willing to risk long term low-level exposure to PCBs one day longer,” said Regina Castro, New York Communities for Change parent leader. “If there are PCBs in our schools, we, the parents, need to know now. New York Communities for Change is calling on the DOE to test every single school that is likely affected and the DOE’s list is long. Almost 750 schools need to be tested immediately.”

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