My name is Shelby Graf, and I am a pediatrician in Minneapolis. I work inpatient at Masonic Children’s Hospital, and at the outpatient pediatrics clinic at Hennepin County Medical Center. I get the experience of providing both preventative care to children, as well as caring for them when admitted to the hospital.

Lead is a toxic metal. In young children, lead toxicity is usually due to ingestion from lead paint, toys, or contaminated drinking water. The effects of lead toxicity are devastating on the developing brain. As soon as a child starts showing symptoms, it’s considered an emergency.

Students with elevated lead levels struggle with developmental delays, higher drop-out rates, reading disabilities, and aggression. Other effects include kidney damage, seizures, and growth delays.

Lasting cognitive impairment is seen in children with lead levels as low as 5 micrograms/deciliter. Chelation therapy with a chemical called “dimercapto succinic acid” or DMSA helps prevent further damage, but it can’t reverse the effects that have already occurred. There is no actual “treatment” for lead poisoning.

In Minnesota, we check the level of lead in about 90 thousand children per year. We screen children at ages 1 and 2 by checking the lead level in their blood, but I have personally seen lead toxicity in children through adolescence.

Working at HCMC allows me the opportunity to care for some of the more vulnerable populations in our community. In this country, Black children with lead levels meeting the treatment threshold is two times higher than the percentage of White children. That percentage is four times higher in children living in a higher poverty bracket compared with those in a lower poverty bracket.

The only way to prevent lead toxicity is to provide children an environment in which they are protected from lead exposure. When a child comes to my clinic with elevated lead, we recommend the family uproot their lives to find new housing. Individual families should not be solely responsible for reducing exposure, especially when the toxic effects are cumulative from every source of lead these children are exposed to. This bill would provide several measures to significantly reduce the risk of lead toxicity for my patients, and so I advocate that you vote yes. Thank you.