

Catherine, who lives in East Oakland, is submitting her written testimony for the record for the Environmental Safety & Toxic Materials Committee hearing on Feb 13, 2018.

Catherine is a mom of a 3-year-old boy named Robbie. They recently found out that Robbie, has elevated blood lead levels. Their home, a single family rental house in East Oakland, tested positive for lead-based paint. During the rainy season, the roof began leaking and the landlord did not fix it. The walls became saturated and the paint peeled all along the back of the house. Eventually, the landlord did fix the roof leak, but then didn't repaint the house. Catherine and her husband have made minor repairs themselves because the home was still affordable by Oakland standards (\$1400 over the five years they've lived there), but they didn't know about the dangers of possible lead-based paint.

Robbie did not speak or have any expression until he was 2 years old, when they tested him for blood lead level. Since then, he's begun to develop behavioral issues, such as hyper-activity and short attention span. Catherine often can't leave the house alone with him because he tries to run into traffic. Doctors have diagnosed him as autistic as well. Catherine suffered depression for months after his diagnosis, saying she blamed herself and felt that their living conditions "ruined his life."

Meanwhile, the landlord has begun to harass the family. She told Catherine that they could stay in another apartment of hers rent-free while the house was repaired, but only if Catherine signs a statement that says the landlord disclosed information to them about the house's lead-based paint before they moved in (which she didn't). Catherine is trying to figure out her rights as a renter and protect her family while navigating her son's therapy and struggling with financial difficulties as a result of his diagnosis. She had to quit her job to care for him. The family's only recourse is to try to hang on until they can save enough to afford a place of their own one day.