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TRENTON – The clock has started for Gov. Chris Christie to decide if he'll sign a bill to restore \$10 million of the money he and other governors raided from a fund to protect children from lead hazards in the home.

The Senate in a 29-6 vote Thursday put the bill on Christie's desk. Because the measure is being passed so late in the session, Christie could 'pocket veto' the bill by simply not acting upon it by Jan. 19.

More than \$50 million has been diverted from the fund since it was established in 2004. An Asbury Park Press investigation last year documented how those diversions, which have been approved by governors and legislators in both parties, have gutted programs that are supposed to help remove lead paint from homes and relocate sick children.

Christie normally doesn't go along with a supplemental appropriation such as bill S-1279, saying all spending decisions should be made as part annual budget process, and there are no signals that he'll view this differently.

Christie spokesman Brian Murray said, "Per our usual policy, we don't remark on pending legislation until we receive a final bill and have had adequate time to review it."

Children's health advocates are hopeful.

"More than 6,000 children in New Jersey have been reported to have elevated levels of highly toxic lead; \$10 million is a drop in the bucket in a \$33 billion budget," said Staci Berger of the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey. "Thousands of homes still contain lead hazards, causing permanent brain damage in young children. We applaud the Senate for passing this bill and providing families the opportunity to do the repairs necessary to make their homes safe and lead-free."

The Senate initially passed the bill in June. Thursday's vote was to agree with a minor change made in the Assembly.

Money in the Lead Hazard Control Assistance Fund is supposed to come primarily from \$7

million to \$14 million a year in taxes collected on every gallon of paint sold in New Jersey. In only one year did the fund receive the minimum it was due, and Christie's administration hasn't provided the fund any paint proceeds since 2011.

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