

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 6, 2016

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Committee on Education and
the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert C. “Bobby” Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and
the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Scott:

We are writing today to strongly urge the Committee on Education and the Workforce to take action to protect America’s school children—and all of the people who work in schools—from lead-contaminated water. Specifically, we request that the Committee convene hearings immediately to identify how to best ensure safe water in our nation’s schools. We also request that the Committee draft bipartisan legislation that delivers resources and guidance to school and community leaders who are working to mitigate the consequences of and striving to prevent exposure to harmful toxins.

As the public health crisis in Flint, Michigan, has continued to unfold, communities and school districts across the country have been compelled to examine the water quality in their facilities. Unfortunately, aging school buildings and years of sporadic and incomplete testing have placed those who learn and work at our nation’s schools at risk of exposure to lead—the consequences of which can be especially devastating to children and persist throughout their lives. A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention underscored the damaging effects of exposure to lead on children’s development and cognitive abilities.

Children across the country could be at risk of tragedies similar to the one that befell children in Flint. Elsewhere, communities are confronting the issue of unsafe water, including recent incidents that have garnered national media attention in Washington, D.C., and Chicago. Families in Portland, Oregon, are also now learning about the extent to which their children may be affected following a recent acknowledgment from Portland Public Schools that a number of its students were exposed to water tainted with unsafe levels of lead.


Although remediating unsafe water in America’s schools requires the leadership of state and local officials, the federal government must be an active partner. Ultimately, government at all levels has a responsibility to do better for America’s children and their families. Lead is toxic, and exposure can cause learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and even lower IQ. Acting now has the potential to avoid increased costs later—costs to education, to our economy, and to society.

The Committee has taken steps in the past to give students access to potable water, and we should take additional steps, using each of the tools within our jurisdiction, to ensure access to safe water. We are ready to work with you to develop effective policies that support local efforts to make sure families no longer have to worry about whether the drinking water in their children's schools poses serious and lasting health risks.

Thank you for your attention to this request and your commitment to advancing the well-being of students in every community.

Sincerely,


Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress


Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress