

Testimony of Tammy Diaz, M.Ed., RN, NCSN
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In Opposition to
LD 206, “Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Portions of Chapter 234: Lead Testing in School Drinking Water Rule, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Health and Human Services, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention”

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

February 9, 2021

Senator Ned Claxton, Representative Michele Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Tammy Diaz, and I am a Nationally Certified School Nurse, a member of the Maine and National Associations of School Nurses and currently working as a school nurse at Winslow Junior High School in Winslow, Maine.

It is the position of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) that “the registered professional school nurse is an important member of the team that mitigates the effects of environmental health hazards in the school setting” and specifically states that school nurses should “advocate for the need to address environmental issues that affect health and learning” (NASN, 2018).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) noted that Maine is one of 11 states with highest risk for lead to leach into water. According to the CDC, health effects of lead exposure can result in behavior and learning problems, lower IQ and hyperactivity, anemia, hearing problems and slowed growth with children and pregnant women being at greatest risk of adverse effects (CDC, 2017). Understanding that lead can leach into water and inadvertently expose children to these harmful effects, it is important to strengthen regulations around water testing in schools including standardized collection practices that meet specifications recommended by health professionals to best protect the health of our growing children.

Maine’s most economically challenged communities often have the oldest schools and are at greater risk for increased lead levels due to older pipe and solder. School buildings are public buildings of education which children are mandated to attend approximately 7 hours a day, 185 days a year in Maine. We have a responsibility to ensure our water is safe for consumption without threats such as lead. The American Academy of Pediatrics, states that no level of lead exposure is safe and that 50 billion dollars per year are spent on childhood lead exposures in the US. Early identification through strengthened water testing practices in schools along with lowering the threshold will provide Maine children with the greatest opportunity to learn and grow. DHHS has put forth a great effort to address safe water in relation to lead exposure for school age children, however stronger measures are imperative to guarantee the safest drinking water for Maine children. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2021). Childhood Lead Exposure Infographic.

https://www.aap.org/en-us/ImagesGen/Lead_infographic.jpg

Maine Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). Lead in Drinking Water.

<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/environmental-health/dwp/cet/documents/leadInDW.pdf>

Lead in School Drinking Water: Information for Parents and Guardians.

<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/environmental-health/dwp/cet/documents/leadInSchoolWaterFAQ.pdf>

National Association of School Nurses. (2015). Environmental Health in the School Setting: The Role of the School Nurse (Position Statement). Silver Spring, MD