



O'MARA, LUPARDO AND ADVOCATES ANNOUNCE LEGISLATION THAT WILL TEST FOR LEAD IN SCHOOLS

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ALBANY – Amid a growing flood of reports of lead in school drinking water around the state and the country, a coalition of legislators and New York public health, environment, and healthy schools advocacy groups will present legislation that will attempt to bring this crisis under control.

Lead is a major health hazard, especially for young children. It has been found in drinking water schools in Binghamton, Ithaca, Rochester, and across Long Island.

The groups presented S.7103A (O'Mara) / A.9687A (Lupardo) and discussed the details of the newly amended legislation.

This bill would require schools to test for lead contamination at the tap in public schools, inform parents and teachers of the test results, provide state funds for testing and remediation, and require the state Department of Health to create an annual report based on these tests.

Right now, there is a patchwork quilt of testing. Most schools in New York get drinking water from either municipal or private (i.e. well water) systems. Under federal and state rules, including the Clean Water Act, schools on municipal systems do not need to test at the tap. Schools participating in the federal school meals program must also have regular kitchen inspections, which include sanitary conditions but not testing the kitchen water for lead and copper. Drinking water quality testing is not consistent across all schools and the results are difficult to find. There is also no single statewide report at this point that would help determine the level of remediation work needed statewide.

State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), **Chair of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee**, "There's no more important place to start this overall and ongoing effort to better address lead contamination than within our schools to protect children. The increasing incidents of lead contamination in school water systems demand that we take short- and long-term actions to strengthen testing, reporting and remediation requirements."

"Lead in school drinking water is a critically important public health issue facing our children today," said **Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, Chair of the Assembly Children and Families Committee** (D-Broome County). "We've worked closely with all of the stakeholders to craft legislation that would require periodic testing of school drinking water and ensure the results are made public. We are encouraging our colleagues to make this a priority before session ends."

"We have a responsibility to protect the safety of the students and staff in every school in New York State. No child or school employee should ever be put in jeopardy by tainted water in their school. Testing for lead in drinking water will ensure we jump start the process of identifying and eliminating such a serious health crisis," said **Senator Carl L. Marcellino (R-Syosset), Chairman of the Senate Education Committee**.

"We have worked closely with both Senator O'Mara and Assemblymember Lupardo to ensure that this draft is the strongest possible, and--importantly--that it can get done before the legislature leaves in a few weeks. We want to thank Senator O'Mara and Assemblymember Lupardo for their strong leadership on this issue and look forward to continuing to work with them to ensure that this bill is passed by the legislature and signed into law by the governor," said **New York League of Conservation Voters Director of Public Policy and Government Relations Christopher Goeken**.

In NYS, public school Building Condition Surveys are conducted once every five years. They require some identification of possible hazards – such as lead pipes used to deliver water to school buildings -- but the state lacks a comprehensive plan for testing all drinking water at the tap and addressing contaminants. It even lacks a way to make the results of current tests readily available to the community.

The federal government banned most uses of lead-based paint in 1977. In 1986, it banned lead pipe and solder in plumbing that carried potable water. And most lead in gasoline was phased out in the 1980s. These measures lead to a decline in the national rates of lead poisoning, but stubbornly high rates of lead poisoning still persist in our urban areas and in communities with high concentrations of children-of-color and or low wealth. Unfortunately, the government never actually dealt with the 3 million tons of old lead that lines the walls and piping fixtures of millions of housing units and thousands of schools.

NYSUT Executive Vice President Andrew Pallotta said: “We must do everything we can to ensure our children are safe — especially when they are at school. While it is unfortunate legislation such as this is necessary today, it is also commonsense. We encourage the New York State Legislature to pass this bill before it adjourns for the year.”

“Lead in school drinking water has arrived as both a state and national concern. Untested and unremediated, it harms children’s brains, impacting their ability to learn. This means money is spent on special education and treatment that should be going to prevention,” **said Claire Barnett, executive director, Healthy Schools Network.** “We thank Senator O’Mara and Assemblywoman Lupardo for their leadership and urge passage of this important legislation.”

“The last place kids should be exposed to lead is in their schools, and we can ensure their safety by preventing poisoning through mandatory testing, reporting and when necessary remediation,” **said Jaqi Cohen, Senior Legislative Associate for the New York Public Interest Research Group.** “With only six legislative session days left, it’s time for Albany to get the lead out its children’s drinking water.”

“The New York State PTA supports this legislation and urges passage as a way to protect our children when they are in school,” **said Bonnie Russell, President, NYS PTA.** “New York State should be doing everything it can to make sure our schools are healthy, and that school environments do not make children sick or harm their abilities to learn.”

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