

JOINT SENATE AND ASSEMBLY PUBLIC HEARING  
Water Quality and Contamination  
September 7, 2016

Statement on Behalf of Maria Castaneda,  
1199SEIU Secretary Treasurer  
Member of the Board Directors, Riverkeeper

There is a growing recognition within organized labor and among working people that environmental degradation affects our communities disproportionately. For 1199SEIU members, protecting the environment is a primary public health issue. As frontline healthcare workers we are dedicated to saving lives, healing and promoting wellness. We know that environmental health is key to achieving those goals.

Environmental health is both global and local in nature for every community. **Today we know that right here in New York State** there are 'mini-Flints' in the water supplies of our schools and local communities. **Today we know that right here in our magnificent Hudson Valley, in Newburgh**, which is home to more than fifteen hundred 1199 members, thousands of residents were likely exposed, for an unknown period of time, to dangerous levels of PFOS (Pee-Foss), a toxic chemical. The city of Newburgh's public water supply tested positive for elevated levels of PFOS in May, and thankfully, it was switched to an

alternative source, **but not until some of the highest PFOS contamination levels ever were detected, at 5,900 parts per trillion.** That's two times the EPA's recommended safety limit. And it was discovered in the drinking water of ordinary citizens.

How did it get there? PFOS is a chemical found in firefighting foam and especially used at airports, including two in Newburgh -- Stewart Air National Guard Base and Stewart International Airport. These airports are believed to be the major sources of PFOS in Newburgh's drinking water.

Medical professionals who study toxic chemicals say blood tests are an important tool to monitor patient health. While we do not yet know what specific level of PFOS in a person's blood might result in adverse health effects, we do know that blood test results can help

- Shed light on the extent of a person's exposure to PFOS;
- Enable people to compare their PFOS blood levels to those in different communities where others have been exposed to elevated levels of PFOS.

New York State has been conducting blood tests for residents of Petersburg and Hoosick Falls for months. The chemicals have been linked to a number of health problems, including cancer, thyroid problems and high cholesterol. Depending on the level of exposure, it can take the body years to flush the chemicals out of

its system.

Unfortunately, the state health department so far has not agreed to a plan that would blood-test residents of Newburgh.

We are here today to urge you to join Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and others in strongly urging the state Department of Health to provide free blood testing for Newburgh residents as part of a comprehensive health screening program.

1199SEIU healthcare workers have always been committed to advocating for the health of our communities, including defending and protecting clean drinking water. Today, we are increasingly aware of the challenges we face, and are renewing and fortifying our commitment, standing ready to work in every way possible to protect our water, our air and our land. Please join us in this effort.

