

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 1475
School Buildings—Drinking Water Outlets—
Elevated Level of Lead (Safe School Drinking Water Act)**

**Environment and Transportation Committee
March 6, 2020
1:00 p.m.**

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The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 1475, which alters the definition of “elevated level of lead” to that which exceeds 5 parts per billion.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland’s public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

We need only turn on the T.V. news or open the newspaper to hear and read stories from across the country of cities and school districts dealing with the horrors of lead contaminated drinking water in their schools. Cities such as Portland (OR), Newark (NJ), Washington (DC) and Flint (MI) have discovered lead leaching into their schools’ potable water systems, effecting the water children consumed—be it from drinking fountains or from the water being used to prepare their school meals in the cafeteria.¹ Here in Maryland, schools in Baltimore City, Montgomery County and Harford County have all had recent experiences with this problem.² In many cases, the school buildings where lead was detected were older and thus had older plumbing systems. Once the lead was detected, water delivery systems were shut down and parents and guardians were informed. But the damage to the children was already done and that damage was irreparable. According to a 2016 policy statement titled “Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity” issued by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), blood lead levels as low as 50 part per billion can impair a child’s cognition.³ According to the report, this low level of exposure can cause “...diminished intellectual and academic abilities, higher rates of neurobehavioral disorders such as hyperactivity and attention deficits, and lower birth weight in children.” In discussing the report’s findings, Dr. Jennifer Lowry, chair of the AAP Council on Environmental Health said,

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/schools-around-the-country-find-lead-in-water-with-no-easy-answers/2016/07/03/b44240fe-37c3-11e6-a254-2b336e293a3c_story.html?utm_term=.d9fef7d65637

(Accessed on February 6, 2020)

² <http://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/High-Lead-Levels-Costly-for-Maryland-Schools-375134051.html>

(Accessed on February 6, 2020)

³ <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/1/e20161493> (Accessed on February 6, 2020)



“We now know that there is no safe level of blood lead concentration for children, and the best ‘treatment’ for lead poisoning is to prevent any exposure before it happens.”⁴

Lead in the drinking water is not only dangerous to our children, but it can have adverse health impacts on the adults in school buildings as well. Adults who have been exposed to lead can experience symptoms such as high blood pressure; joint and muscle pain; difficulties with memory and concentration; mood disorders, abdominal pain; headaches; and damage to reproductive systems.⁵

Six years after the Flint water crisis began, we are only beginning to comprehend the long-term consequences to the children. The costs to school systems who will be required to provide remediation and support services to these children could be astronomical well into the future. While we cannot prevent the exposure children around our state have already experienced, we can take proactive steps to ensure that this does not happen in the future. This bill stands as a powerful preventative measure that will benefit every student and every educator and school staff member in our state. We cannot teach our children if they are home sick or if we are ill.

Remediating lead contamination in our schools is a critical public health need. By revising the current definition of “elevated level of lead” to 5 parts per billion, we can better ensure the safety and health for all of Maryland’s children and educators. **We urge a favorable report on House Bill 1475.**

⁴ <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/pages/With-No-Amount-of-Lead-Exposure-Safe-for-Children,-American-Academy-of-Pediatrics-Calls-For-Stricter-Regulations.aspx> (Accessed on February 6, 2020)

⁵ <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/lead-poisoning/symptoms-causes/dxc-20275054> (Accessed February 6, 2020)