

SB 992 – School Buildings - Drinking Water Outlets - Elevated Level of Lead (Safe School Drinking Water Act)
Laura Stewart – Maryland PTA
Senate Environment, Health, and Education Committee - February 11, 2020
SUPPORT

Chairperson Smith and Committee Members,

My name is Laura Stewart and I am here today representing Maryland PTA, the state's oldest and largest child advocacy organization that serves as a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education. We represent thousands of volunteer members in 900 public schools and we are comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. For nearly 105 years, our mission has been to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Maryland PTA submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 992, the Safe School Drinking Water Act. In short, the bill would lower the acceptable lead levels in school drinking water to 5 parts per billion from 20 ppb.

When the original Maryland school drinking water lead testing bill passed in 2017, it required that all school drinking outlets be tested at 3 year intervals. If the test results showed a lead level above 20 parts per billion, the outlet had to be turned off until it was remediated and re-tested. This level came from the EPA's 3 T's (A Training, Testing, and Taking Action Approach) guide. The GAO then came out with a report stating that the 20 ppb recommended in the 3 T's guide was not health based. The 3 T's now has removed the 20 ppb language, and has replaced that language with the following: "There is no safe level of lead for children. EPA encourages schools to prioritize remediation efforts based on lead sample results and to use the steps in the toolkit to pinpoint potential lead sources to reduce their lead levels to the lowest possible concentrations." In that same guide, Appendix D uses 5ppb as an example as a very low amount of lead. The American Academy of Pediatrics now recommends lead levels at under 1 ppb for children. We now know that any lead exposure can harm children.

Unfortunately, there is no such thing as a lead free fixture and that achieving zero lead in water could be problematic, although we should look at that goal in the future. FDA uses the 5 ppb as their guidelines for bottled water, and our neighbor, Washington DC uses the 5 ppb lead limit, with a goal of less than 1 ppb. Montgomery County Council, acting as a board of health, has also adopted the 5 ppb lead level, with the Montgomery County Public Schools fully supporting the measure.

We are asking that Maryland use the 5 ppb guideline since the 20 ppb is not health based. The failed outlets may be turned off, and then the most used outlets can be prioritized. We encourage use of the Healthy School fund in order to target schools with the highest levels of lead. The benefit outweighs the costs of lead exposure to growing children's brains. Knowing what the damage of lead can do to children's ability to learn, removing sources will only enhance educational opportunities. Many older school facilities are in higher poverty areas, and these are the schools that have the most issues with lead in their fixtures. This is an equity issue. Our schools with PTA's that are financially well off buy water filter filling stations so their children have already been more protected from lead. Please protect all of Maryland's children in all our zip codes by voting favorably on Senate Bill 992.

Respectfully,
Laura Stewart
Maryland PTA Advocacy Committee