

The Baltimore Teachers Union



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**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland House of Delegates
Before the Senate Education, Health, and Environment Committee
Testimony by Gerimi Belin, Public School Teacher, Green Street Academy, Baltimore
February 11, 2020
SB 992– Environment - Drinking Water Outlets in School Buildings –
Elevated Level of Lead and Grant Program
Safe School Drinking Water Act
SUPPORT**

Good afternoon Mister Chair and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

My name is Gerimi Belin. I am a science teacher at Green Street Academy who has been teaching biology and chemistry for nine years in Baltimore City Public School System. I am also an active member of the Baltimore Teachers Union. For my colleagues and students at Green Street Academy, as well as all schools in the public school system, I ask for a favorable report for SB 992.

Mister Chair and members of the committee, school buildings in Baltimore City are some of the oldest public school buildings in the state. For a number of years now, because of fears that the pipes that bring drinking water to our students contain unacceptable levels of lead, the school district has made the decision to import bottled water into our schools rather than risk poisoning our students and staff with unsafe drinking water.

Lead is known in the scientific community to be one of the most devastating neurotoxins known to man. The state's own Department of Health found that, between 1993 and 2013, 65,000 children in Baltimore City tested positive for dangerously high levels of lead in the blood. Science has also confirmed that an elevated level of lead in the bloodstream is especially harmful to children as they grow and develop. Even small amounts of lead have been associated with learning disabilities, speech delays, lack of impulse control, aggressive tendencies and ADHD. And while having Baltimore City Public Schools pay to import bottled water for students and staff to drink, it is merely an unsustainable remedy to this problem, draining an already strained city schools budget.

Mister Chair and members of the Committee, SB 992 will go far in addressing these issues by setting a standard definition, apart from the subjective and often politicized views of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency definition, of what constitutes an unsafe level of lead in the drinking water. It will also provide grants to the numerous school systems in the state that can be used to repair or replace drinking water systems that have been found to violate the new state standards.

Members of the Committee, for too long, the students of Baltimore City have gone to schools where we as a state cannot be certain of the safety of the drinking water provided to them through drinking fountains. The science is clear, any level of lead is detrimental to the vital development of children, and these damages last a lifetime. My colleagues in the Baltimore Teachers Union and I call for a favorable report on SB 992. Thank you.