



**Board of Education of Howard County  
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,  
Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee  
February 24, 2021**

**Board of Education  
of Howard County**

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**SB0546: UNFAVORABLE**

**School Buildings - Drinking Water Outlets - Elevated Level of Lead (Safe School Drinking Water Act)**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **SB0546 School Buildings - Drinking Water Outlets - Elevated Level of Lead (Safe School Drinking Water Act)** as an unfunded mandate to expedite remediation of Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) drinking water outlets.

Under a change in law and subsequent regulations from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) that went into effect in 2018, the HCPSS Office of the Environment currently works to remediate drinking water outlets above 20ppb – the concentration in drinking water that exceeds the standard recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) technical guidance. Schools must conduct lead monitoring on outlets every three years, unless a waiver is granted, and lead monitoring must also be conducted within one year of substantive plumbing upgrades or renovations. A subsequent change in the law in 2019 requires reporting of testing results above 5ppb but less than 20, which began in December 2019, with grant funds available for school systems that worked proactively to reduce levels to below 5ppb.

HB0636/SB0546 would further require school systems to remediate all outlets tested prior to June 1, 2021, and found to have lead levels above 5ppb, by August 1, 2022. This one year timeframe would strain HCPSS resources – both financially and due to the plumbing staff needed to address the more than 425 outlets that have readings between 5 and 20ppb out of the approximately 5,000 tested across the school system. Staff estimates completion will cost nearly \$780,000. With the action level being lowered, costs may significantly increase above this estimate for removal of piping (in the ceiling, below the concrete slab, etc.) beyond the fixture/faucet.

The HCPSS Office of the Environment is proactively working to address readings above 5ppb following the completion of initial testing as resources are available. As staff works towards this goal, fixtures above 5 ppb and below 20 ppb do not have to be turned off, which has significantly less impact on instruction in schools. Yet another change in the law now that is not based on scientific EPA guidance, and with the addition of a constrained timeframe, makes planning for budgeting and staffing purposes problematic.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report of SB0546 from this Committee.