

To: The Honorable Chair, Senator Paul G. Pinsky, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

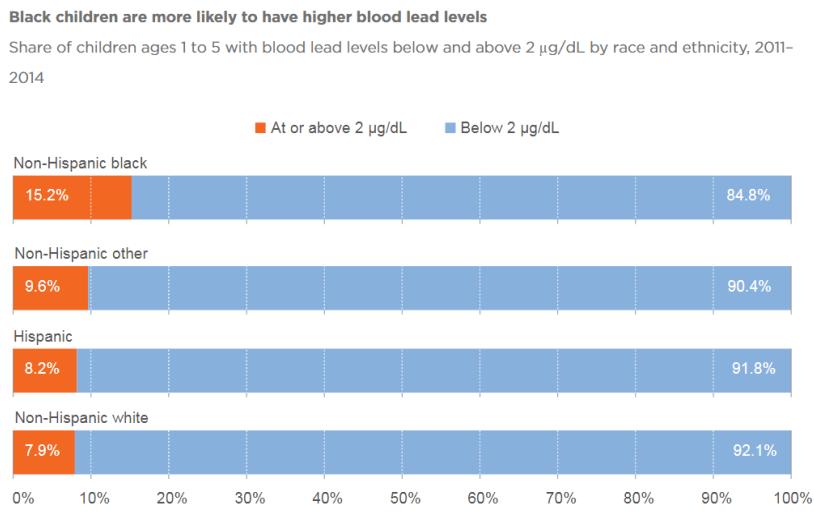
From: Melissa S. Rock, Birth to Three Strategic Initiative Director

Re.: **SB 546: School Buildings - Drinking Water Outlets - Elevated Level of Lead (Safe School Drinking Water Act)**

Date: February 24, 2021

Position: **SUPPORT**

Surveys from 2016 estimate that 15 to 22 million people across the country have lead water pipes.<sup>i</sup> The American Water Works Association did a study recently which found that nearly a third of U.S. water lines contain lead.<sup>ii</sup> The estimate is that there are six million lead service lines across the U.S.<sup>iii</sup> Lead exposure happens “through the corrosion of lead service lines (the part of a water pipe that connects a...building to the public water main).”<sup>iv</sup> As Child Trends points out, “**no level of lead in the blood is considered safe.**”<sup>v</sup> In fact, research shows that even lower levels of lead in the blood (3-5 µg/dL) “can damage the brain, leading to impaired memory and executive functioning skills.”<sup>vi</sup> It is also important to note that not all children are equally impacted by lead poisoning. Children of color are more likely to experience lead poisoning than white, non-Hispanic children.<sup>vii</sup>



Children who are lead poisoned are 7 times more likely to drop out of school and 6 times more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system.<sup>viii</sup> Given the racial disparities in who experiences lead poisoning, this is another driver of the racial disparities in educational outcomes and criminal justice system involvement. Learning disabilities that can affect children who have been lead poisoned include: violent, aggressive behavior; speech delays; Attention Deficit Disorder; hyperactivity; diminished IQ; hearing and memory problems; and reduced motor control and balance.<sup>ix</sup> SB 546 ensures that “elevated level of lead” includes any lead concentration in drinking water that exceeds 5 parts per billion.

In 2019, the General Assembly passed the Lead Reduction and Remediation Act, though this did not guarantee sufficient funding for all affected schools to repair and/or replace lead-

contaminated pipes or water outlets. While most schools in Baltimore City have banned drinking from all sinks and water fountains, 519 schools across the state have been found to have elevated levels of lead in the drinking water supply, including more than 200 schools in Montgomery County.

**We urge this committee to issue a favorable report on SB 546 to help eliminate the exposure to lead poisoning that Maryland's children currently face in their schools and to help avoid the lifelong impacts the lead poisoning can have.**

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/united-states-can-eliminate-childhood-lead-exposure/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.sciline.org/evidence-blog/lead-drinking-water>

<sup>iii</sup> Id.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/united-states-can-eliminate-childhood-lead-exposure/>

<sup>v</sup> Id.

<sup>vi</sup> Id.

<sup>vii</sup> Id.

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.greenandhealthyhomes.org/home-health-hazards/lead>

<sup>ix</sup> Id.