

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Brandon M. Scott
Mayor, City of Baltimore

Linda Chinnia
Chair, Baltimore City Board
of School Commissioners

Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises
Chief Executive Officer

Letter of Information
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
Senate Bill 546
School Buildings - Drinking Water Outlets -
Elevated Level of Lead
(Safe School Drinking Water Act)

February 24, 2021

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners understands the concerns with lead in the water. As a school district that has a history of elevated lead levels in drinking water, and a City with very old and dilapidated water pipes and infrastructure, the Board understands the importance of such legislation.

In 2019, House Bill 1253 Chapter 557 passed and this legislation has required schools be proactive in reducing lead in drinking water outlets to 5 parts per billion and the State provided funding through the Healthy School Facility Fund to offer financial assistance to school districts to meet this standard.

City Schools took the following proactive steps to support House Bill 1253:

- Provided new building water filtration systems for Point of Entry and Point of Use in new school construction.
- Provided Point of Use sites: Yorkwood, Lakeland and North Avenues
- Provided potable water coolers for all schools for cooking and drinking.
- During COVID -19, we continue with all schools being provided water coolers for use.

Senate Bill 546 is requiring drinking water outlets in schools to have no more than 5 ppb of lead, as opposed to the current standard of 20ppb (EPA guidelines). At this time, the City Schools Operations Department is providing filter changes to 22 school sites, 4 times a year at a cost of \$6,000,000 for each exchange. A total for these 22 sites is \$528,000 and are providing bottle water coolers to all school buildings for drinking and cooking purposes at a cost of \$848,000.

If this legislation is adopted and to meet the standards, City Schools would be required to provide two choices:

1. Continue with current usage of bottle water to all schools, current fiscal year budget line item \$848,000 plus 3% for miscellaneous items, such as cups as an example **,or**
2. Add new Point of Entry filtration system for all school buildings at a cost of \$26,650,000: cost includes installation of water filtration system, water fountains, piping, additional miscellaneous requirements to support installation

City Schools has the oldest building stock in the State. City Schools receives approximately \$30 million in state school construction funds and \$17 million per year from the City of Baltimore for school construction. These funding amounts in no way would allow the school board to provide funding to remediate the water outlets at a cost of over \$26 million. The legislation allows funding for the remediation from the Healthy Facilities Fund. This fund has not been funded in the budget. However, even with funding from the Healthy Facility Funds, there is not enough funding to cover all of the costs associated with remediation.

Additionally, many school buildings have inadequate heating and cooling systems, roofing, windows, and piping systems. Given the critical needs of our aging infrastructure, we completely understand the reasons for this legislation.

The 21st Century Buildings Program, supported by this General Assembly, has allowed City Schools to renovate and construct 28 school buildings (closing 26 schools), but this means there are approximately over 100 buildings that still need renovating. It is estimated that it would cost approximately \$4 billion for all of the remaining school buildings in City Schools to meet adequate educational standards. The school board has advocated for decades for additional funding for school construction. Remediating for safe drinking water is important as is repairing, replacing and adding roofs, heating, air conditioning, chillers, boilers, and other systemics in school buildings.

For the foregoing reasons, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners understands the need for this legislation and hopes that safe drinking water and other school construction needs can be properly fully funded as soon as possible.

Dawana Merritt Sterrette, Esq.
Director, Legislative and Government Affairs
dsterrette@bcps.k12.md.us
443-250-0190

Melissa Broome
Director, Policy and Legislative Affairs
mcbroome@bcps.k12.md.us
443-525-3038