

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 Environmental Affairs Committee
Testimony by Gerimi Belin, Public School Teacher, Green Street Academy, Baltimore
February 24, 2021
SB 546 – School Buildings - Drinking Water Outlets –
Elevated Level of Lead (Safe School Drinking Water Act)
SUPPORT**

Good afternoon Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs 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 Senate Bill 546.

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 546 will go far in addressing these issues by setting an appropriate definition of what constitutes an unsafe level of lead in the drinking water. By changing what counts as an "elevated level" of lead in the drinking water in our public schools from the current standard of 20 parts per billion—which was intended for defining safe drinking water for an adult—to 5 parts per billion. Children are much more susceptible to the harmful effects of lead in the drinking water than adults, hence the need to lower this standard for our schools.

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 546. Thank you.