

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 30, 2021

The Honorable Michael Regan
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Administrator Regan:

We write to express concern over the lead contamination in Illinois' drinking water and request the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) use its full authority and resources to address the issue, including by updating the Lead and Copper Rule (LCR) so that it protects public health and is backed by the best available science. We also ask that any stakeholder outreach include a representative from Chicago or Illinois as they are some of the areas most impacted by the outcome of this rule.

We applaud the U.S. EPA's recent announcement to delay the implementation of the proposed Safe Drinking Water Act Lead and Copper Rule. For decades, this rule has been woefully inadequate, as highlighted by our nation's ongoing crisis with lead-contaminated drinking water. Lead is a known neurotoxin that can cause irreversible brain damage, lower IQ scores, developmental delays and behavior issues. More than 400,000 deaths a year in the United States are linked to the toxic metal.

In 2013, a peer-reviewed study published in *Environmental Science & Technology* showed that "the existing regulatory sampling protocol under the U.S. Lead and Copper Rule systematically misses the high lead levels and potential human exposure."¹ Yet the Trump Administration's updates to the LCR made only meager changes, maintaining the 15 part per billion (ppb) "action level"—despite the consensus among public health officials that there is no safe level of lead—and giving utilities a longer timeline to replace lead-tainted service lines.

Illinois is an epicenter of this crisis: our state has more service lines made of the toxic metal than any other state. The city of Chicago has more than any other city in the United States. A recent article in the *Chicago Tribune*² highlights these challenges, noting that between 2015 and 2020, tap water measurements in dozens of Illinois homes showed hundreds and even thousands of parts per billion of lead—just as extreme as what researchers found during the same period in Flint, Michigan. As is with many problems in our nation, this lead contamination is often the worst in Black and brown communities, with data from one predominantly Black community in Illinois showing as much as 5,300 ppb of lead in the drinking water.

¹ *Environ. Sci. Technol.* 2013, 47, 16, 9300–9307. <https://doi.org/10.1021/es4003636>

² <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/environment/ct-illinois-lead-service-pipes-20210319-rifuuexkezb5bf6ncltqlb4m6a-story.html>

These chronic issues in Illinois and across the United States call for the toughest possible standards backed by science. We urge EPA to update and implement a Lead and Copper Rule that takes into account the best available science, protects the health of all Americans and will help reverse the existing inequities in access to safe drinking water. Given the extensive amount of lead service lines in Illinois, and Chicago specifically, we also ask that you include a representative from Illinois or Chicago in any stakeholder outreach events you hold. These citizens will be some of the most effected by the implications of this final rule, making their input vital to the process. Your attention to this issue is critical as EPA is the last line of defense in safeguarding public drinking water.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator