



February 5, 2020

## Let's Get Lead Out of Our Water

At our February 3, 2020 #GetTheLeadOut Town Hall meeting, we heard subject-matter experts present current information on the dangers of lead in Illinois drinking water. Lead in drinking water is a problem that exists in Illinois and Chicago. This is a major issue and is dangerous, especially to children.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, no safe level of lead exposure in children has been identified. Exposure to lead can seriously harm a child's health and cause well-documented adverse effects such as:

- Damage to the brain and nervous system
- Slowed growth and development
- Learning and behavior problems
- Hearing and speech problems

This can cause:

- Lower IQ
- Decreased ability to pay attention
- Underperformance in school

There is also evidence that childhood exposure to lead can cause long-term harm.

Iyana Simba, a clean water advocate from the Illinois Environmental Council, told people at our Town Hall that she believes the threat of lead contamination in our drinking water is significantly higher in Chicago than almost anywhere else in the United States. "We have to combat this public health crisis," said Simba. "This will be accomplished by arming our communities with the knowledge they need to push for policy changes that will keep their families safe from toxic lead in our drinking water."

We also heard presentations from: Jeremy Orr, Staff Attorney for the Safe Water Initiative for the National Resources Defense Council; Pastor Scott Onque, Advocacy/Policy Director of Faith in Place; Rebecca Raines, Environmental Justice, Chicago West Side NAACP, and Thomas D. Huggett, MD, MPH, Family Physician at Lawndale Christian Health Center.

Between 2016-2019, the Chicago Department of Water Management conducted a study that tested before and after lead levels of 2,100 homes that either received meter installation or were located near a water main replacement. The study found 7.1% of homes tested for increased lead levels, above the U.S. EPA's 15ppb action level for lead in drinking water.

A Tribune analysis of the results shows lead was found in water drawn from nearly 70 percent of the 2,797 homes tested during the past two years. Tap water in 3 of every 10 homes sampled had lead concentrations above 5 parts per billion, the maximum allowed in bottled water by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

City and EPA officials advise that residents can protect themselves by flushing household plumbing for three to five minutes when water hasn't been used for several hours. But in one of five Chicago homes tested since January 2016, the Tribune analysis found, samples contained high levels of lead after water had been running for three minutes. Even after

water had been running for five minutes, 9 percent of the homes tested had lead levels above the FDA's bottled water standard.

Evidence shows we have high levels of lead in Chicago's water supply and we need to replace lead service lines. In addition, a great deal of water is lost underground. Unsafe water supply is harmful to our families' health, and insufficient water supply adds an unnecessary financial burden on families across Illinois.

I am pushing for the removal of lead pipes in order to eliminate risks, so I have filed HB3035 that would require municipalities including Chicago to come up with a plan to replace lead pipes. Let's safeguard our health, especially the health of our children, and get the lead out of our drinking water.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford  
State Representative-Eighth District