

February 2, 2022



**CONSERVATION
MINNESOTA**

Chair Mike Freiberg
House Preventative Health Policy Division
381 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Re: HF 2650 (Jordan)

Dear Chair Freiberg and Committee Members:

We write to express our strong support for HF 2650 (Jordan). This bill takes critical and long overdue steps to eliminate lead from drinking water pipes and protect Minnesotans in every part of the state from the devastating effects of lead exposure.

The public health disasters caused by lead pipes in Flint, MI and Newark, NJ brought national attention to the dangers of old lead pipes. Because lead plumbing fixtures were not completely banned until 1986, any community with homes built before 1986 may have lead contamination in drinking water. The primary source of concern is old lead service lines which bring water from the water main to individual homes and buildings. In 2019, the Minnesota Department of Health estimated that Minnesota has approximately 100,000 lead service lines, although the actual number is likely to be larger.¹

Health Risks of Lead Exposure

The health risks of lead exposure, especially to children, are undisputed. The American Academy of Pediatrics warns that even small amounts of lead exposure can cause cognitive impairments, learning disabilities, lower educational achievement, and neurobehavioral disorders such as hyperactivity and attention deficits. There is no safe level of lead exposure.²

Despite the known risks of lead and the fact that there is no safe level of lead exposure, too many children are still at risk. In the fall of 2021, a nationwide study found that in blood level tests of 1 million children under the age of 6, over half had detectable lead levels.³

1 MDH, Lead in Minnesota Water (2019), <https://health.mn.gov/communities/environment/water/docs/leadreport.pdf>

2 American Academy of Pediatrics, Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity: Policy Statement, <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/138/1/e20161493/52600/Prevention-of-Childhood-Lead-Toxicity>

3 Hauptman et al, Individual and Community Level Factors Associated with Detectable and Elevated Blood Levels in US Children, JAMA Pediatrics Dec. 2021, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34570188>

While children are the primary concern, adults with prolonged exposure to lead are also at risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, kidney disease, and decreased fertility.⁴ Pregnant women and their fetuses are especially vulnerable to lead exposure since lead can significantly harm the fetus, causing lower birth weight and slowing mental and physical development.⁵

Studies have repeatedly confirmed that lead poisoning has a disproportionate impact on low income children. Children under the age of six in Minnesota who live areas with more poverty than the state average are more than two times as likely to have lead poisoning.⁶ A recent nationwide study found that 60.2% of children living below the poverty line had detectable blood lead levels compared to 38.8% of children not living in poverty.⁷

Eliminating Lead Service Lines

Service lines are the pipes that transport treated drinking water into homes, schools and businesses. Typically, part of the service line is publicly owned, and part may be located on private property and owned by the property owner. It is necessary to replace ALL portions of lead service lines to protect against lead contamination.

These old lead pipes may not be leaching lead into the water at the present time, but this does not mean the pipes are safe. Nearby construction, water main repairs, changes to water treatment, and other disturbances can shake loose lead particles that have been sitting in pipes for years. The water crisis in Flint was brought on when the city switched to a water source that wasn't properly treated to prevent corrosion. **The only way to permanently protect drinking water from old lead pipes is to remove the pipes.**

Financing the replacement of both the public and private components of lead service lines has historically been the biggest obstacle to solving this longstanding public health problem. Bond funds cannot be used for the privately owned portion, and assessments for the work are not viable in low income areas. As a result, this solvable problem has languished, thousands of outmoded, dangerous lead pipes are still in the ground, and Minnesotans are still at risk of lead in drinking water.

Recent concern about childhood lead exposure has resulted in changes to federal rules that will require communities to inventory and map lead service lines in the coming years. In addition, increased federal funding for lead pipe replacement will be made available. However, state policy will in large part dictate the speed with which these changes are deployed to protect the public from lead exposure.

4 CDC, Health Problems Caused by Lead, <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/lead/health.html>

5 MDH, Lead in Minnesota Water at p. 3.

6 MDH, Health Inequities in Childhood Lead Exposure, https://data.web.health.state.mn.us/web/mndata/equity_lead#byPoverty

7 Hauptman et al.

We strongly support the provisions of HF 2650 that would create a program for eliminating all lead service lines in the state by 2032 and would provide the direct grant funding necessary to ensure that cities can replace the private as well as public portion of lead service lines. Given the clear and catastrophic public health risks of lead in drinking water, these provisions represent appropriate and critical steps to accelerate the identification and elimination of these dangerous old lead pipes in our state.

Economic Benefits of Removing Lead from Drinking Water

In 2019, MDH issued a report completed in conjunction with the University of Minnesota on the benefits of removing lead from drinking water. The report found that the estimated benefits of removing lead from water include improvements in population mental acuity and IQ, and resulting increases in lifetime productivity, earnings and taxes paid. The projected range of benefits was found to be \$4.24 billion to \$8.47 billion over 20 years.⁸

In addition to the economic benefits of reducing lead exposure, replacing lead pipes will provide good paying construction jobs around the state. One study has estimated that replacing lead pipes in Minnesota will lead to 2,430 jobs annually for 10 years.⁹

Conclusion

In our communications with Minnesotans from every part of the state, we consistently find that protecting against exposure to toxins in drinking water is a primary concern for citizens. We strongly support HF 2650 which would make significant progress in eliminating the risk of lead exposure in Minnesota's drinking water.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.

Sincerely,

Nels Paulsen
Policy Director

8 MDH, Lead in Minnesota Water (2019), <https://health.mn.gov/communities/environment/water/docs/leadreport.pdf>

9 Getting the Lead Out: Employment & Economic Impacts from Replacing America's Lead Pipe, August 2021, https://e2.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/E2-UA-Economic-Impacts-from-Replacing-Americas-Lead-Service-Lines_August-2021.pdf