

October 10, 2018

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Acting Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Secretary DeVos and Acting Administrator Wheeler:

We write to urge the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to take immediate action to protect students from lead in school drinking water. A recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that an estimated 41 percent of public school districts, serving 12 million students, did not test for lead in school drinking water.¹ Furthermore, GAO found that where school districts tested for lead, more than a third of school districts found elevated lead levels. Given that lead exposure can result in a variety of health impacts, especially for young children, we urge you to swiftly implement GAO's recommendations to encourage more school districts to test for lead and take immediate action to combat lead in school drinking water.

As you know, lead is a neurotoxin, and any amount of exposure in a child can slow growth and development, damage hearing and speech, and cause learning disabilities. The Flint water crisis, which was caused by a series of unconscionable and short-sighted decisions, renewed national awareness about the dangers that lead exposure poses to children and public health. The crisis also underscored that even the most basic resource within our communities, safe drinking water, cannot be taken for granted – a reality confronting schools across the country.

- In Michigan, the Detroit public school system shut off drinking water at all of the city's public schools after finding elevated lead or copper levels in multiple public schools.
- In Wisconsin, 169 buildings in the Milwaukee Public School System were found to have at least one fixture that supplied water with elevated lead levels.
- In Indiana, 61% of 915 schools tested in recent months found at least one fixture with elevated lead.
- Schools in Colorado, Florida, New York, Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and many other states are also confronting lead in their drinking water.

The GAO report made clear that ED and EPA must accelerate actions to address this problem. While both of your agencies provide guidance and other resources to states and school districts regarding testing and remediating lead in drinking water, GAO found that some EPA regional offices have not communicated the importance of testing for, and remediating lead in, school drinking water to school district personnel. Furthermore, GAO found that ED and EPA do not regularly collaborate to support state and school district efforts to address lead in drinking water,

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/692979.pdf>

despite agreeing to do so in a 2005 memorandum of understanding. In total, GAO offered ED and EPA seven recommendations that will encourage school districts to test for lead and ensure testing and remediation efforts are aligned with best practices.

In addition to the GAO's recommendations, ED and EPA should outline proactive steps that protect students from lead in school drinking water. Such steps may include evaluating how existing ED and EPA programs can be updated to better support lead testing and remediation.

It is critical that you implement these common-sense recommendations immediately, and we ask that you provide us with a timeline for completing all seven of GAO's recommendations. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that all schools are fulfilling their duty to provide students with clean drinking water that keeps all children safe and healthy.



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

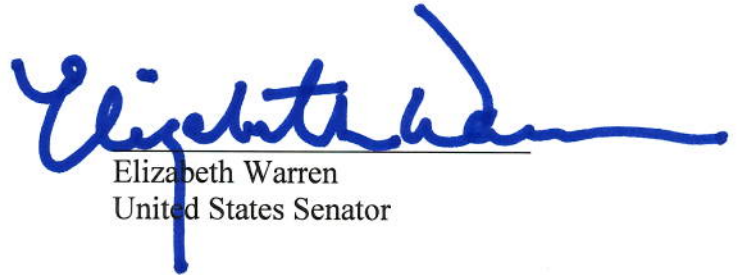
Sincerely,



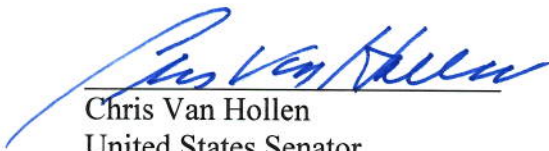
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

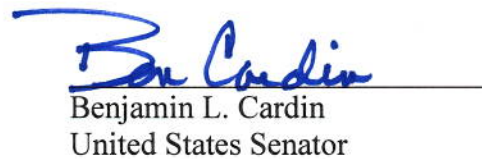


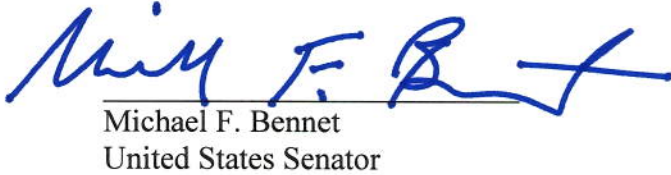
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

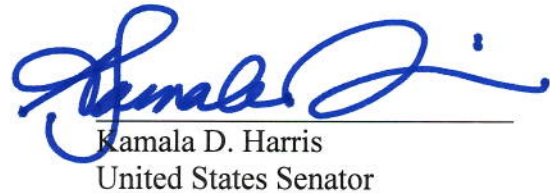

Joe Donnelly
United States Senator

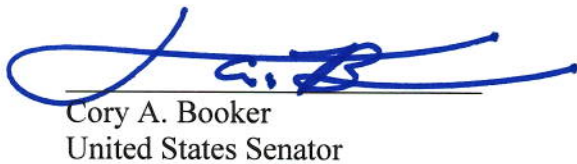

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

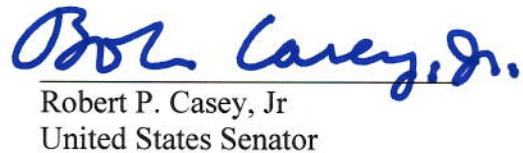

Michael F. Bennet
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United States Senator

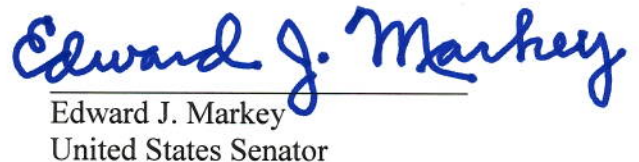

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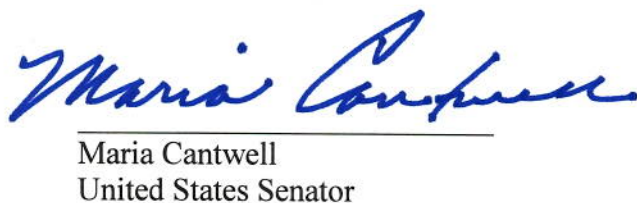

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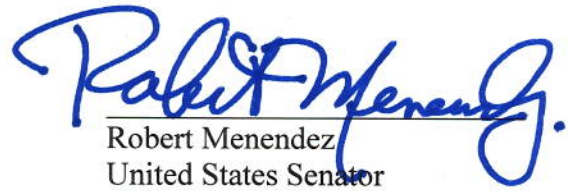
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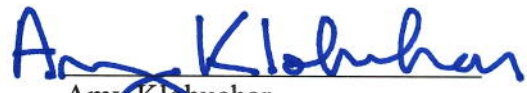
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Jeffrey A. Merkley
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