



February 14, 2022

Hon. Curtis G. Sonney  
214 Ryan Office Building  
P.O. Box 202004  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2004

Dear Chairperson Sonney,

By way of background, our nonprofit organization, Women for a Healthy Environment (WHE), educates individuals about environmental exposures to public health, provides action steps communities can take to mitigate those risks, and advocates for solutions that create a better tomorrow for all. Through community programming, technical assistance, coalition-building and advocacy, WHE focuses on creating healthy environments in three key areas: homes, schools and early learning centers. We had the pleasure of meeting a few years ago when we shared information about our 1000 Hours a Year program, which provides funding to western PA school to test and remediate for lead and radon.

Ensuring safe drinking and cooking water in the learning environment is crucial to the success and well-being of the students and staff who learn, grow and play in them. Since 2017, WHE has identified and remediated lead in drinking water hazards in over 200 schools and early learning centers in western Pennsylvania. In the schools we have supported, every school district had at least one building with a detectable level of lead. We know that schools, especially those in environmental justice communities, rely on financial resources such as the WIIN grant program to cover the costs of remediating lead hazards. After all, merely testing is not enough to address this environmental health hazard.

Cognizant that testing is insufficient and mindful of the limited financial supports for schools, we believe that the most effective way to mitigate lead poisoning in our schools is to implement a standardized filter-first program via HB 465. In addition to our lead hazard remediation programming, WHE produces the biennial State of Environmental Health in Pennsylvania Schools Report through primary data collection from a randomized sample of school districts across the commonwealth. 89% of school districts in this sample reported testing for lead in drinking water within the last ten years, with the majority (72%) of testing occurring in the 2018/2019 school year. Of those school districts that tested, 71% of them identified lead in drinking water hazards; and of those school districts that identified lead in drinking water hazards, only 9% of schools remediated them.

Our 1000 Hours a Year program consistently finds an exceeding number of leaded faucets and fixtures that must be replaced with certified lead-free parts. When compounded with the fact that many schools and childcare centers have lead service lines, the extent and costs of remediation can be significant. A filter-first approach, therefore, would be the most cost-effective strategy to reduce the number of children who are exposed to lead at school—a place where they are supposed to grow and thrive.

While a filter-first program is a helpful first step, it cannot be the only step taken. As stated in our public comments in 2020 and 2021 to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's proposed revisions to the Lead and

Copper Rule, we also recommended stronger testing protocol, action levels that reflect public health risk, and communication strategies for early learning and K-12 buildings.

Water filters are a priority need for the school community that ensures protection of health for all its occupants, including our most vulnerable, children, as well as women of child-bearing age. We respectfully request that the Education Committee takes swift action to address this critical issue.

Sincerely Yours,



Michelle Naccarati-Chapkis  
Executive Director

Talor Musil  
Health Policy Manager

CC: Representative Karen Boback, District 117, Pennsylvania House of Representatives; Christine Seitz, Executive Director, House Education Committee (R); Erin Dixon, Executive Director, House Education Committee (D)