

Sen. Taylor: Testimony begins on legislation to get out the lead

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(MADISON) –At the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy, Senator Lena Taylor (D-Milwaukee) testified yesterday on Senate Bill 48 which would allow municipalities to authorize water utility services to fund the replacement of both private and public sections of lead service lines, not just the lines that the city owns. The Senator offered the following testimony:

“Chairman Cowles, Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 48, and thank you especially to Sen. Cowles for reaching across the aisle and joining with me to author this important legislation to address this statewide public health crisis.

No one on this committee needs to be told that lead is toxic and should not be in our drinking water. But what you might not know is how long-lasting and wide-ranging the effects of lead poisoning are. Even low levels of lead in children can cause lifetime issues such as lowered IQ, developmental delays, learning disabilities, and behavioral problems. An increase in blood lead levels in children of only 10 µg/dL can cause a permanent drop in IQ as high as 7 points. Increased lead exposure has also been linked to increases in ADHD, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and criminal activity. Additionally, more than 90% of lead accumulates in the bones. It can then be released into the blood, which exposes organ systems to lead long after the original exposure. This is why long-term lead exposure has irreversible and lasting damages, cardiovascular effects, increased blood pressure, decreased kidney function, and reproductive problems in adults.

Lead poisoning has affected citizens across the state, specifically children. According to current CDC guidelines there is no safe level of lead exposure for children. However in 2015, a statewide test showed lead contamination levels over 5 µg/dL in 1.9% of children under one, 4% in one-year olds, 5.6% in two year olds, and 4.6% in three to five year old tested. While these percentages may not seem high, this adds up to thousands of kids whose health is being put in danger by lead contamination. In 2014, Milwaukee specifically accounted for 60% of the 4,000 children who tested positive for elevated lead. Additionally, 8.6% of children in Milwaukee had levels above which children were known to suffer significant health problems, compared to 4.9% of children at this level in Flint, Michigan.

These are scary numbers, but the good news is that these problems are preventable if we replace the lead service lines that deliver our water. There are around 200,000 lead service lines in the state, and 70,000 residential lines are in Milwaukee alone. The only way to protect completely from lead contamination is to remove and replace all lead service lines. The challenge that many municipalities have faced in replacing these pipes is that the last section of pipe leading into the home is owned and controlled by the homeowner, not the city. If the city replaced only the lead service lines they own, that would actually make the lead problem worse, by causing more lead to leach into the water at the joints where the lead and non-lead pipes connect. In other words, in order to replace any lead service lines, we have to replace every lead service line. However, under current law, water utilities can only use rate-payer revenue to replace publicly owned service lines. SB 48 addresses this issue by allowing municipalities to authorize their water utility to fund the replacement of both the private and public sections of the lead service lines. Thank you again for hearing this bill, I look forward to continuing to work with this committee to help get the lead out.”

A full pdf of the Senator’s testimony can be found [here](#).