

# Wisconsin League of Women Voters: Supports water protections in Governor's budget, calls for bipartisan support

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Contaminated drinking water is a serious issue faced by a growing number of Wisconsin residents. Reports from locations around the state of well water containing E.coli, nitrate, PFAS compounds, and other contaminants are growing, and there are still numerous lead service lines in use.

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin believes that access to clean water is a public trust and a fundamental right. High quality water is essential to maintaining our quality of life and the strength of our economy. We were therefore pleased when Governor Evers declared 2019 the "Year of Clean Drinking Water" soon after taking office. We are gratified to find that his proposed biennial budget reflects that priority.

By restoring science to the Department of Natural Resources the executive budget addresses not only currently well-known and understood problems, such as the need for replacing lead pipes, but also emerging problems that require more research.

Specifically, the budget calls for an additional \$70 million in bonding for water quality programs. This includes funding to replace lead service lines under the Safe Drinking Water Loan Program and funding of several existing and new programs to reduce the incidence of childhood lead poisoning. It includes funding to local units

of government and farm groups to reduce pollution under the Safe Drinking Water Program, the Targeted Runoff Management Program, and the Soil and Water Resource Management Program. These programs provide assistance for both infrastructure and non-infrastructure (education, outreach, data informed decision making) projects.

Governor Evers' budget proposal makes it easier for individuals to obtain funding under the Well Compensation Grant Program. It also increases Concentrated Animal Feed Operation (CAFO) fees which are currently the lowest among five midwestern states (MN, IL, MI, IA, WI). Under the proposed budget, the CAFO revenues will be used to create five new positions devoted mostly to CAFO regulations. The Governor's budget calls for the creation of a Bureau of Natural Resources Science and the funding of five additional science positions. At least two of these new positions must be devoted to work on a serious emerging health issue, contamination by per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The work would include the development of a model to identify and prioritize sites with likely PFAS contamination.

"The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin applauds these funding initiatives as significant but they are only a first step toward clean drinking water for everyone in our state. The \$40 million allocated for lead pipes, for example, would replace only about 16,000 of the estimated 170,00 lead service lines in

Wisconsin. A long-term funding commitment is still needed if Wisconsin wants to guarantee access to clean water for everyone," said Erin Grunze, executive director.

In early January, in response to the discovery of a large number of contaminated wells, the Assembly Speaker announced the creation of a bipartisan task force to study state water quality. In March, this task force began to hold information-gathering sessions. We hope this is an indication that clean water will be one area in which there will be productive collaboration between the legislature and the Governor.