



AUGUST 26, 2019

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MEDIA ADVISORY

Taking Action to Solve Newark's Drinking Water

Trenton, NJ. (AUGUST 26, 2019)

One of New Jersey's favorite sons, Bruce Springsteen, frequently says, "Nobody wins unless everybody wins." That is how New Jersey mayors view the issue of lead in our drinking water and the current situation in Newark. We are in this together and we must find solutions collectively. Eliminating lead in our drinking water is too critical and the problem too widespread for any one municipality to tackle alone, even our largest city, Newark.

If any issue should unite us all, it's our drinking water. An estimated 350,000 New Jersey homes and businesses have lead service lines. Over 1.5 million New Jerseyans, throughout the State, run the risk of exposure to lead poisoning every time they open the tap. We stand with mayors across the state, who are finding elevated lead levels in their drinking water. But this is not only a Garden State problem—as we speak to mayors across the country, it becomes crystal clear that this is a national problem.

Water knows no boundaries, but pipes certainly do, and any solution must be a collaborative one that flows first from our mayors and New Jersey's local leaders. They know our communities, they know our residents, and they know that the long-term solution demands the necessary funding to make the long-overdue upgrades to our infrastructure. Local leaders must be provided the necessary tools. Like many older cities, Newark needs immediate funding to modernize its water distribution system. We join our representatives in both Trenton and Washington in calling for immediate additional investments.

Newark is not alone. Like many older cities and centers, Newark needs the federal and state governments to invest in infrastructure improvements. The failure to act falls disproportionately on our cities and centers, often on low-income communities of color.

We commend the actions taken by Mayor Baraka to minimize risks for residents. The city took early steps in creating its Lead Service Line Replacement Program, including accelerated funding, which started the replacement of the service lines at a no cost to residents. In addition, the city launched a new corrosion control treatment in the Pequannock service area in May,

which experts believe will help reduce lead levels by the end of the year. Further, the city has worked closely with the Governor's office, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to take immediate steps to protect its residents. While this issue will not be resolved overnight, these are positive steps in the right direction.

There is something we can all do to help now. The City has partnered with the United Way of Essex and West Hudson and the Community Food Bank of New Jersey to coordinate bottled water donations to city residents. You can [visit United Way of Essex](#) to make online donations for the purchase of bottled water.

But ultimately, the solution is long-term and requires elected officials at all levels of government to take leadership in advancing 21st century infrastructure, be it rail, energy, roads, or simply the ability to turn on the faucet for safe drinking water. We call on all of our elected officials to come together to be part of the solution to provide access to clean drinking water and invest in modernizing our state and nation's aging infrastructure.

Colleen Mahr is the Mayor of Fanwood and President of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities. NJLM is a voluntary association created to help communities do a better job of self-government through pooling information resources and brain power.

Albert Kelly is the Mayor of Bridgeton and President of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association. NJUMA is dedicated to working with state and federal lawmakers and officials to develop appropriate and effective public policy measures that benefit the state's urban centers and to help lawmakers understand how public policy affects New Jersey's cities and municipalities.

William Chegwidan is Mayor of Wharton and President of the New Jersey Conference of Mayors. NJCM provides a unified approach and open line of communication to our State and Federal Legislatures and Administrations that reflects the will of the people of the great State of New Jersey and works to improve the health and well-being of all its residents.