State Lawmakers, Local Leaders, Impacted Residents Urge New Funding for Lead Pipe Replacement in the State Budget

Director of Clean Water Rob Hayes discusses the need for more funding to replace lead service lines across New York.

_**State Senate and Assembly propose $50 million to get the lead out of drinking water**_

Albany, NY – Today, state legislators, local officials from Rensselaer and Schenectady Counties, and Troy residents gathered to urge state leaders to include funding to replace dangerous lead pipes in the final state budget, due April 1.

The State Senate and Assembly budget proposals contain $600 million for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act, including $50 million in grants to replace lead pipes at no cost to homeowners. Senator Rachel May (D-Syracuse) and Assemblymembers Jonathan Jacobson (D-Newburgh) and John McDonald (D-Troy) led _budget letters_ with dozens of their colleagues in the effort to secure the $50 million.

Since 2017, New York has appropriated $4.5 billion for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act. _**But the Governor’s office has only dedicated $30 million of that grant funding for lead pipe replacement – just 0.7%. No new lead pipe replacement grants have been made since 2019.**_ The State Legislature’s proposed investment would guarantee that a portion of new funding would be dedicated to lead remediation.

Throughout the state, many older homes have lead pipes which result in elevated lead levels in the water. The US EPA has established that there is no safe level of lead exposure, with young children especially at risk. Recently, residents in Troy, NY demanded action after the city detected high levels of lead in some homes’ drinking water. Troy has
now proposed a plan to replace 100% of their estimated 4,500 lead pipes at no direct cost to residents.

Troy and other cities need additional state grant funding to afford to get the lead out of drinking water. There are an estimated 360,000 lead pipes across the state, including an estimated 15,000 lead pipes in Syracuse and 2,500 lead pipes in Newburgh. Newburgh has also detected elevated levels of lead in the drinking water of some homes, and cities like Syracuse and Poughkeepsie struggle with high rates of childhood lead poisoning.

An estimated $1.8 billion is needed to replace all of New York’s lead pipes, assuming a cost to replace each lead pipe of about $5,000. New York will receive over $500 million in grants and loans from the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to replace lead pipes over the next five years, but this will only address about a third of the state’s total need. On March 16, the Rensselaer County Legislature unanimously adopted a resolution urging New York State to dedicate more grant funding for lead pipe replacement.

Assemblymember Jonathan Jacobson said, “I organized a budget letter to Speaker Heastie because there are still more than 360,000 lead services lines delivering drinking water to New Yorkers in areas with aging water systems. The vast majority of affected residents simply cannot afford to do this necessary repair without this funding. The Lead Service Line Replacement Program provides up to a $10,000 credit to homeowners regardless of income. $50 million is not enough, but it will at least put the State on a path towards 100% lead pipe replacement.

Assemblymember John T. McDonald III, RPh said,”As a former Mayor and as a legislator who has consistently advocated with my colleague Assemblymember Otis each year to include water infrastructure funding in the NYS budget, I firmly believe that we all need to work together to address the need to replace lead pipes which lead to elevated lead water levels. Thank you to the advocates, my legislative colleagues, municipal leaders, residents, and all who will continue to work together to address this public health issue. The federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding is a start as we look to full lead service pipe replacement; however, the need is great and New York State funding in the budget will be vital to continue the progress toward our shared goal.”

Senator Rachel May (D-Onondaga, Cayuga) said, “With this $50 million commitment to replace lead pipes in older homes, we can provide lead free drinking water to more children and New Yorkers across the state. In Syracuse, there are an estimated 15,000 lead pipes endangering drinking water and increasing the risk of childhood lead poisoning. Lead paint, lead in soils, and lead pipes are a deadly combination for children. I meet all the time with moms whose children have suffered brain damage from lead poisoning. Lead poisoning can cause hyperactivity, mood swings, and violent behavior, and it is believed to be a significant factor in our rising youth crime rate. Our kids, their parents, their neighbors, their schools all deserve the chance at a lead-free life. This is the year to do it. New York has not provided any new state grants to replace lead pipes since 2019, so it’s really good news that both the Senate and Assembly have made it a priority this year, and
that we are here together today to reinforce the importance of making this a reality this year.”

Assemblymember Deborah Glick said, “Clean drinking water is essential. By including this funding in the budget, we will enable the replacement of dangerous lead pipes for many New Yorkers, especially the most vulnerable. I applaud the leadership of the Speaker and my colleagues on this issue and urge the Governor to join with the Assembly and Senate and include this vital funding in the final budget.”

Senator Sean Ryan said, “Lead poisoning is a scourge that affects families in every part of New York. Exposure to lead causes a wide variety of issues that have long-term detrimental impacts. If we are truly committed to the health and well-being of our children, we must do all we can to eliminate lead from New York’s living spaces and drinking water. Replacing lead pipes is an impactful action we can – and should – take immediately to protect New Yorkers.”

Assemblyman Steve Otis (91st District – Westchester) said, “The State Assembly is again taking a leadership position in advancing clean water programs. Lead pipes are a hidden public health threat that many local governments are addressing. Our Assembly budget proposal includes important state funding to support lead pipe removal programs throughout the state.”

Assemblymember Amanda Septimo said, “Access to clean drinking water is a human right. Safety and maintenance of local water supply for New York State Residents is a fundamental right. The replacement of lead pipes is essential to ensure the safety and wellbeing of entire communities affected by this harmful contaminant, and lessen the health risks of lead poisoning in young children across New York State. A family’s ability to afford replacement lead pipes in old homes shouldn’t depend on whether or not the water your child is drinking is safe. I stand with the residents of Troy, Rensselaer, Newburgh, and the other communities across New York State that can’t bear the cost of lead pipe replacements, and deserve to have a clean water supply for their families.”

Assemblymember Jennifer Lunsford said, “For too long, we have relied on children’s health as indicators that people are exposed to dangerously high levels of lead in their homes and schools. The prevalence of lead pipes, particularly in our historic towns and villages, has long presented an unacceptable risk to our families. We must prioritize investment in replacing this infrastructure and ensuring that the high cost of protecting the public’s health does not fall upon the shoulders of individual homeowners and tax payers. That is why I am so proud to see the legislature earmark $50 million in funding in the Clean Water Infrastructure Act to help offset the cost of replacement for our communities. I fought to get this funding in the one house and I will continue to fight to keep it in the final budget. Thank you to all of the advocates who work so hard to keep our water clean.”

Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara, a civil engineer by trade, said, “It’s time for our state to finally rid itself of the dangers of lead in our drinking water infrastructure. Despite knowing for decades about the dangers of lead exposure, more than 360,000 lead service
lines are still delivering water to New Yorkers — this is unacceptable. Replacing these lines can be an incredibly difficult process for many because of the upfront costs for these repairs. That’s why it’s so important to provide funding in this year’s state budget for the state Department of Health’s Lead Service Line Replacement Program that can help communities remove and replace lead service lines. Prioritizing this funding will help keep our drinking water safe in communities statewide for generations to come.”

Assemblymember Tony Simone said, “Decades after lead pipes were banned, hundreds of thousands of them remain in New York. The only safe level of exposure to lead is zero and the only lasting solution is the removal of all lead pipes. That’s why we in the Assembly included a dedicated line item in the budget to address this issue, ensuring a healthy future for New York.”

Assemblymember Jo Anne Simon said: “Ensuring that New Yorkers have access to clean water and air is not only fundamental to public health, but it is guaranteed under our state constitution. We must protect our drinking water from harmful lead exposure, and increased funding for the Lead Service Line Replacement Program will help. This program has replaced service lines for over 2,300 households throughout the State, and increased funding will ensure more communities can protect their drinking water from harmful toxins. I’m thankful to Assemblymember Jacobson for leading this effort.”

“Every New Yorker has the right to clean drinking water and while Troy has worked to replace lead service lines, we cannot do it alone,” said Troy Mayor Wm. Patrick Madden. “As our leadership in state government puts together a finalized 2023 State Budget, I call on them to allocate the necessary funds that local governments need to protect our families from the potential of lead poisoning. I also encourage neighbors in the City of Troy to take action and call our Department of Public Utilities if there is any question about the quality of their water for free testing and replacement servicing.”

Mike Elmendorf, President & CEO of the Associated General Contractors of New York (AGC NYS) said, “Lead pipes and unsafe drinking water are a public health concern for everyone across our state and beyond. Increasing available funding for lead pipe remediation provides critical peace of mind to homeowners, business owners, parents, teachers and healthcare workers that they can rely on clean drinking water. We owe it to New Yorkers to invest more in clean water infrastructure, which is an overdue step towards implementing a long-term solution for our clean water needs today and tomorrow.”

Kyle Belokopitsky, NYS PTA Executive Director offered, “There is nothing more critical than the health and wellness of our children – clean and safe drinking water is a necessity for all families. On behalf of our 2.6 million school children, we fully support these proposals and thank the legislature for their commitment to children. We are hopeful Governor Hochul will agree to increased funding for this initiative.”

Joshua Klainberg, Senior Vice President at the New York League of Conservation Voters said, “The most effective way to get the lead out of drinking water is to replace the
lead service line. Communities across the state are eager to remove lead service lines quickly, efficiently, and equitably— and having the resources to do so is critical. We thank the legislature for answering the call to action from the federal government that is already supplying funds to New York State from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, as well as environmental and public health advocates who concur that there is no safe level of lead exposure.”

**Greg Campbell-Cohen, Managing Officer of TIMBER** said, “Cities in Upstate New York lack the financial tools they’d need to address a problem of this magnitude at a reasonable clip. Any serious solution to lead in drinking water needs to include state and federal dollars. A lot of people have said things like: ‘I don’t want people to panic and leave Troy over this.’ I don’t want that either, but the way to stop that from happening is by replacing the lead service lines as quickly as possible.”

**Bobbi Wilding, Executive Director of Clean + Healthy** said “Most people think lead poisoning is a thing of the past – but lead is the original “forever chemical” and pipes installed long ago continue to threaten the safety of New Yorker’s tap water and the health of our children. The only permanent solution is replacing the pipes. That’s why it’s essential that this year’s budget include additional funding for this and for Governor Hochul to increase allocation for lead pipe replacement under the Clean Water Infrastructure Act,” said Bobbi Wilding, Executive Director of Clean+Healthy. “Lead poisoning is an ongoing slow-motion catastrophe. The only way to prevent harm to this and future generations is to act now, and invest real money to removing lead from people’s homes.”

**Rob Hayes, Director of Clean Water with Environmental Advocates NY, said,** “For too long, New York has lagged behind other states when it comes to replacing dangerous lead pipes. We applaud the Senate and Assembly budget proposals for including new state grants to get the lead out of drinking water. This is an essential start – we must achieve 100% lead pipe replacement, and that will take significant state and federal investment. We urge Governor Hochul to support including at least $50 million in the final budget to replace lead pipes, public health, and create good-paying jobs across the state.”

**Liz Moran, New York Policy Advocate for Earthjustice, said,** “It has been understood for decades now that exposure to any level of lead presents risks to people of all ages, which is why it must be a top priority of government to address all routes of exposure. Lead service lines are the primary source of lead in drinking water, and formula-fed infants can receive most of their lead exposure from drinking water used in the formula. With over 360,000 lead service lines in New York, and an aging water infrastructure crisis, we applaud the Legislature for recognizing this crisis and increasing funding for the Lead Service Line Replacement Program and Clean Water Infrastructure Act. We join our partners and communities to urge the Governor to support this increase to be included in the final budget.”