

Testimony  
Congressman Josh Gottheimer (NJ-5)  
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment  
Proposals for a Water Resources Development Act of 2020  
Members' Day Hearing – February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Thank you, Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Subcommittee Chairwoman Napolitano, Subcommittee Ranking Member Westerman, and to the members of the Committee, I greatly appreciate you hosting this important hearing and for having us here today. I appreciate you seeking input as you prepare a new Water Resources Development Act, and I am here to sound the alarm about a threat to the health and safety of our families and kids: dangerously elevated lead levels in our drinking water.

We know that exposure to lead can have a severe impact on our children, stunting development and causing learning disabilities, irreversible harm to brain development, the nervous system, and vital organs. Every child deserves to drink water that's free of lead, and every parent deserves to know if their child's school has lead in their pipes, sinks, or water fountains. However, lead water continues to be a pervasive problem in schools across the country and in my District in North Jersey.

Since 2012, nearly 2,000 water systems across the U.S. have found elevated lead levels in tap water samples, a significant public health concern. In schools, there is the additional danger of leaching lead from school water fountains, which children and teachers use daily. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates testing across the country's roughly 90,000 public schools remains inconsistent and the results are often unknown. In my District, I issued a comprehensive report which found that 12 percent of 85 school districts did not report the results of lead testing on their district website for parents to see. And of the 88 percent of school districts that did post lead testing results, 52 districts indicated at least one outlet within their system that had a problem with lead in their water.

Simply put, this problem will not fix itself, and we must take immediate action to help schools and communities nationwide address this urgent issue.

I was proud that last Congress, a key piece of my bipartisan legislation, the Lead-Free Schools Act, was enacted into law, creating a targeted pilot program using existing resources to improve drinking water infrastructure in schools nationwide.

Additionally, I called on officials in my home state of New Jersey to create a central, easy-to-access database that schools report into every year with lead water results for parents to find easily. This online portal will ensure that parents have access to critical information about the safety of drinking water in their children's schools. As we move forward with a new Water

Resources Development Act, I call on you to include much needed resources for communities in New Jersey and across America to identify and remove lead pipes in their water infrastructure.

Just as we focus on safe drinking water for our families and kids, we must also focus on ensuring bodies of water utilized for recreation and tourism are safe as well. It is essential that we take immediate steps to help communities address Harmful Algal Blooms, or HABs. Last year, HABs broke out in bodies of water all across the country, including at Greenwood Lake in my District. HABs cause millions of dollars in lost revenue for small businesses that rely on lake eco-tourism, and pose a severe health hazard to visitors and wildlife.

In New Jersey, this toxic algae disaster was caused by a perfect storm of warmer than usual temperatures combined with rain and phosphorus run-off from mountains, roadways, and fertilizers.

Given the impact of climate change, these higher temperatures are likely not a one-off occurrence, but now just part of our every day. Just like with other environmental emergencies, we need to act. It will take a comprehensive strategy, working together – a true local, state, and federal partnership.

This is not a partisan issue. I was proud to work with Democrats and Republicans to claw back needed resources to affected lakes in my District. Today, I am calling on this Committee to help our pristine, world-class lakes combat HABs by authorizing funding to more deeply study the causes, and invest in effective solutions. Many lake commissions, including Greenwood Lake, are strapped for cash, and would greatly benefit from additional federal investment to prevent further environmental disasters caused by HABs.

Thank you for holding this important hearing, and allowing me to discuss these critically important issues facing our families, small businesses, and communities. I am confident that if we work together, we can bring clean drinking water to every community and school, and stomp out Harmful Algal Blooms for good. I look forward to continuing to work with you on these important issues.