



Date: January 27, 2016

To: Senate Appropriations Committee

From: Gilda Z. Jacobs, President and CEO

Re: House Bill 5220, Flint Supplemental

The Michigan League for Public Policy is pleased that the Legislature is moving quickly to appropriate resources for the families and children of Flint who have been exposed to toxic lead because of governmental failures at many levels. We support the supplemental budget bill before you today, with the understanding that it is a first step in addressing the needs in Flint. More will be required for a long-term fix of the state's public health system as well as its infrastructure.

The Flint water crisis is unfortunately just the tip of the iceberg. Many of the children exposed to lead through their drinking water are also subject to other toxic stresses that come with poverty, including lead paint exposure from substandard and older housing; poor nutrition and regular family food shortages; lack of access to early intervention services such as those through the state's Early On program; family stress related to unemployment; and limited access to mental health and substance abuse services.

We are gratified that this supplemental budget bill begins to take a broader approach—beyond the distribution of water and water treatment products. It will take an interdepartmental approach that looks at both public health and community infrastructure, as well as state policies related to early education and care, family income supports, housing, nutrition, and access to mental health and substance abuse services.

We cannot lose track of the reality that Michigan will have to do more than focus like a laser on a single struggling city. On the issue of lead exposure alone, there are hotspots across the state (see attached map) where children are exposed to toxins that cause **entirely preventable**, lifelong damage.

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We look forward to working with you as you address the needs of children and families in Flint and other areas of the state. In the short-term, we urge you to focus on the youngest children who are most affected by environmental toxins because the very architecture of their brains is still developing. To that end, we recommend the following short-term additions to the budget:

- Approximately \$2.5 million for Early On assessments of approximately 4,500 children ages 0 to 3 in Flint. The Early On program is in place, and can be utilized to assess and help serve young children affected by lead.
- Additional funding for home visitation programs in the City of Flint. An expansion of funding statewide is important, but an initial expansion of approximately \$500,000 in the Flint area will help support families affected by the current crisis.

Given the importance of good nutrition in ameliorating the effects of lead, the League also supports the extension of WIC benefits to children through the age of 10, and is pleased that the MDHHS is exploring that option. We understand that approximately \$3.3 million would be required for the expansion, along with federal cooperation. In addition, following the national trend, Michigan should eliminate the asset test on Food Stamps to help bring more federal dollars into the state for adequate nutrition for children.

Finally, we are concerned that the funding available for lead abatement is completely inadequate. The MDHHS estimates that it can cost between \$15,000 and \$20,000 to fully abate lead from a home including paint and water sources. There are needs for abatement statewide, with low-income children and children of color most at-risk because of their concentrations in communities with older housing.

Thank you for your attention to the children and families of Flint, as well as those at risk of lead exposure throughout the state.