

Testimony of Melissa Mays, Flint Resident and Founder, Water You Fighting For?

Congressional Committee on Energy and Commerce

“Modernizing Environmental Law: Challenges and Opportunities for Expanding Infrastructure and Promoting Development and Manufacturing”

February 16, 2017

Main points:

- **Human Cost of Neglecting Infrastructure and weak environmental regulations**
- **Benefits to investing in all infrastructure**
- **Importance of updating, strengthening, and enforcing environmental regulations, protective laws, and environmental agencies**
- **We must plan to invest in the safety and well-being of all consumers and ensure these laws are health-based.**

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Today is Day #1028 since we have had clean and safe water in the city of Flint, Michigan. We are coming up on the 3rd anniversary of the irresponsible switch of our water source and the subsequent failure of our government to properly treat the water and protect our aging infrastructure and more importantly, our lives. The next 1028 days have been nothing short of a living hell for the 100,000 residents of Flint.

The lack of stronger, enforced environmental regulations allowed our State Department of Environmental Quality to get away with loopholes in the Lead & Copper Rule for testing and reporting. In the effort to save just a few dollars per day, they exploited the weak existing rule, and the defunded EPA, and poisoned 100,000 innocent people. People who depended on their government to provide the simplest of services: clean, safe water. Children like mine were never warned not to go get a glass of water out of their taps because there might be hidden neurotoxins in that water that are invisible to the naked eye. Senior citizens never stopped to think twice about the dangerous, unwanted chemicals they were drinking while taking their prescribed medication. I never imagined that the water I was filling my workout bottle with before heading to the gym, could possibly kill me.

Because of travesties like the hugely outdated Lead & Copper Rule and the absence of bathing and showering standards, nearly 200 people died from pneumonia caused by bacteria in our water. For the past 4 weeks, I have been suffering from a respiratory infection plus ear infections caused by the bacteria *pseudomonas aeruginosa*, which is present in my shower at a plate count of 2.9 million.

Before 2014, I had 3 happy, healthy, active sons. My oldest, Caleb, tested into a dual enrollment school where he could take high school and college courses at the same time and be able to graduate with a diploma and an Associate's Degree. My middle son, Christian, is sharp. His teachers wanted him to accelerate a grade since elementary school. My youngest, Cole, is the sweetest boy you could ever meet with his little dimples, adorable baby voice, and his everlasting innocence, which is now lost as he knows he was poisoned by politicians who want to save money.

Fast forward to today, Caleb almost failed his Junior year because he could not remember the homework he had done the night before and would fail his tests. He calls it "brain fog" so he had to re-learn how to learn. Imagine going through 12 years of school and having to teach your brain a different way to remember because of being exposed to lead, copper, aluminum, total trihalomethanes, chloroform, 1, 4 Dichlorobenze, Bromodichlormethane, acetone, bacteria, and numerous other contaminants through drinking water and showering in your own home.

Christian and Cole have severe bone and joint pain as lead settles in your bones as well as your growth plates. For kids ages 9-14, their growth plates are open and spongy to accommodate their muscles and joints to be able to stretch as their bones hit those 4-inch growth spurts. Both he and Cole get to start their second round of painful physical therapy since their growth plates are hardening prematurely. Christian and Cole also talk about the brain fog and it terrifies me, because even I know that your brain continues to develop until you are 25. My sons are also seeing a rheumatologist, which also comes with a lot of blood work. Unfortunately, Christian passes out when it comes to needles. This will carry on through the rest of my sons' lives. Because someone wanted to save money.

My husband is 41 and has dizzy spells to wear he nearly faints and is in constant pain. I am 38 and have a rheumatologist for my autoimmune disorder that looks like Lupus. I have a neurologist for my new seizures, as lead and copper are stored in your brain. I have a gastroenterologist because drinking caustic water tears up pipes in the ground as well as your intestines and I have IBS and diverticulosis. I have consulted with a toxicologist and an Environmental Physician who helped us develop a detox plan but says it's moot since we are still being exposed in the shower to dangerous toxins as our pipes crumble in the ground. As now an infectious diseases doctor to help with the bacterial infections.

We use only bottled water to cook with, drink, brush our teeth, and give our pets because our water is too unsafe. We spend so much time either sick, going to the doctor, taking baggies full of medications, or buying shower filters. Try to picture that in your head before suggesting that protecting your family's health and mine is too expensive. Tell that to the restaurants in Flint that closed down because residents don't want to drink lead in their coffee or eat bacteria in their chicken noodle soup. Tell that to the dentists who lost patients because no one wants a cleaning with neurotoxin-laced water. Tell that to the families of the people that have died from Legionnaires Disease, which was entirely preventable with tougher environmental laws and investment in infrastructure. Tell them their loved ones' lives were not worth businesses taking the proper precautions to NOT poison their customers.

Since the infrastructure in Flint is still failing, as mains break and pipes leak in the ground, our sidewalks are crumbling, our streets are caving in and causing huge sinkholes that make it dangerous for ambulances to rush down my street to the hospital in an emergency. And our homes' have flooded basements as the water table fills up.

There is no amount you can place on the safety, health, and well-being of the taxpaying human beings and pets living in this country. So before cutting back on environmental regulations and infrastructure funding, find another area to make cuts. We pay our taxes so our government can do their job and ensure something as simple and life-sustaining: clean, safe water.

Seeing and suffering firsthand the devastation that can and will happen with reduced or weakened environmental regulations and decreased funding for infrastructure updates has opened my eyes to where we are as a country. The health, safety, futures, and lives of the residents have fallen far behind the desire to cut costs and pocket more money. This is short-term thinking and reckless. If you want to protect your constituents' lives, you must implement updated and stringent environmentally sound regulations and pollution restrictions. Otherwise you will just be ushering in thousands of more Flints across this great country of ours. I hope that the pain and suffering of my family, my sons, is a lesson and a warning to each of you. Put yourselves in our shoes before you start slashing regulations to make a profit. Thank you.