

**Opening Statement of Rep. Gene Green
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittees on Environment & the Economy and Health
Hearing on “Flint Water Crisis: Impacts and Lessons Learned”**

April 13, 2016

Good morning and thank you all for being here for this important hearing.

The drinking water crisis in Flint, Michigan is a national tragedy. It was a preventable man-made disaster that should have been intervened months before it caught the nation’s attention. Most tragically are the estimated 8,000 children under age 6 who were exposed to unsafe levels of lead who may need lifelong services to live fully productive lives.

Childhood lead poisoning is a tragedy impacting communities throughout the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 500,000 American children under age 6 have blood lead levels above 5 micograms, the level recommended for public health actions to be initiated.

Children from low income communities and communities of color, like those in Flint and communities I have the honor of representing in Houston and Harris County, are two to three time more likely to have elevated blood

levels, based on CDC data. No child in America, regardless of background or income, should be a victim of lead poisoning.

The City of Houston has been proactive on this issue. Houston is one of six cities to be part of the CDC Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, with the ambitious goal of eliminating childhood lead poisoning in the city by 2020. In 2013 alone, over 24,000 children were screened for lead and since 1996, nearly 3,000 homes have been remediated for lead paint.

I support these efforts, but more must be done to ensure that every child is tested for lead and all older homes are lead paint free in Houston and across the nation. Unfortunately, this CDC program was drastically cut in recent years, from \$30 million in 2011 to \$15 million last year. HHS, working with Congress, must ensure that this and similar programs get the resources they need to protect our children from lead exposure.

A recent study conducted by the American Water Works Association (AWWA) estimates that there are 6.1 million lead services lines in use nationwide, serving 15 to 22 million Americans. Though lead service lines are greater concentrated in the Midwest and Northeast, LSLs are found in every state. My home state of Texas is estimated

to have 270,000 lead service lines still in use, 8th highest in the country.

If we are going to eliminate lead out of our drinking water once and for all, our nation must commit to a comprehensive plan to replace lead service lines. This will necessitate coordination between water utilities, cities, states, and EPA, with a sizeable commitment of resources from the federal government to support local communities and low income households replace their lead service lines.

I am proud to join my colleague, Rep. Paul Tonko, as an original cosponsor of the Aqua Act, which will reauthorize the Safe Drinking Water Act for the first time in 13 years and give states greater resources to update our nation's aging drinking water infrastructure by increasing funding for the state revolving fund.

The Safe Drinking Water Act was passed by Congress four decades ago to ensure public drinking water supplies throughout the nation. It is clear today that SDWA failed to protect the people of Flint and other communities around the country. As the committee of jurisdiction, we need to know why.

Much of the responsibility for this failure appears to point to the Lead and Copper Rule. The LCR has not seen major revisions in 20 years.

I am very interested in hearing what EPA has done to modernize the LCR and what revisions the public health and water utility experts before us today believe are necessary to ensure that our public water systems are lead free.

I hope that today's hearing will bring frank and fruitful discussion on these critical issues and public health, and that we can find common ground moving forward to ensure that this terrible tragedy never hits another great American city.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.