

Testimony of David Masur, Executive Director of  
PennEnvironment  
Before the Senate Institutional Sustainability & Innovation  
Committee  
May 8, 2026

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Senate Institutional Sustainability & Innovation Committee today on the important topic of lead in school drinking water.

My name is David Masur, and I am the Executive Director for the statewide nonprofit environmental group, PennEnvironment. PennEnvironment works to promote clean water, clean air, and protect our state's incredible outdoors and natural resources.

PennEnvironment has a long history working on the topic of lead in school drinking water. We have written multiple studies on the topic, and 2022 we helped craft and pass new legislation to address the threat of lead in school drinking water across the School District of Philadelphia. This legislation is considered the Cadillac of protections, and it is this policy on which Senator Robinson's SB759 is modeled.

The science is clear: lead at any level is unsafe for human health.

Yet recent studies and self-reported data from school districts across the commonwealth show that lead in school drinking water remains a significant problem across Pennsylvania. Women for a Healthy Environment, for example, showed that more than 90% of school districts in the commonwealth that tested for lead in their schools' drinking water were reporting lead contamination. PennEnvironment's 2022 study found that 98% of Philadelphia's school buildings tested positive for lead in drinking water.

Why is this problem persisting - even after the legislature required schools to start testing for lead in drinking water in 2018 and report the results?

In part, there has been a failure of implementation.

But more fundamentally, the "test and fix" policy that seemed so promising is now running into a hard scientific fact: Because lead testing is highly variable, experts are

now telling us that the water from a fountain or faucet can be “highly hazardous” even if several samples fail to detect lead.

Because children spend so much time in school buildings during the prime years of their development, lead contamination in school drinking water is particularly dangerous. It’s well-proven that lead exposure causes numerous negative health effects, including damage to the nervous system, learning disabilities, and impaired hearing.

For all these reasons, is it critical that the state legislature revisit this matter with a policy based on prevention. Instead of relying on variable testing results, Senator Robinson’s SB759 will require school districts to install filters certified to remove lead on every tap used for drinking water.

This is both the most effective and financially responsible way to address the threat of lead in school drinking water.

Lawmakers in Michigan - home to the Flint water crisis - have now adopted this “filter first” policy with broad bipartisan support, which we have determined is now the strongest law in the country.

This issue is broadly supported across the political spectrum, from MAHA moms to progressive organizations. The policy solutions in SB 759 have been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the PA Medical Society and the American Heart Association, as well as labor unions like the Pennsylvania building trades, PSEA and AFT-PA, to parent groups like the Pennsylvania PTA, plus over 100 other organizations and dozens of local elected officials.

With our kids’ health at stake, Pennsylvania can - and should - be a leader on this important issue, by enacting Senate Bill 759.