



**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING  
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W.  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

April 1, 2021

Muriel Bowser  
Mayor of the District of Columbia  
Executive Office of the Mayor  
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

We are writing to you today regarding funding for the District's lead water service line replacement programs. Through these programs, DC Water has been able to remove and replace thousands of lead water service lines in the District at little to no cost to homeowners. Unfortunately, there are still more than 20,000 lead service lines serving homes and businesses in the District. Every day that these lead service lines remain in the ground, they continue to pose a significant health risk to residents living or working at these properties.

As you know, there is no level of exposure to lead that is safe. The harms caused by lead are most acute for infants and children, affecting brain development at this crucial life stage, causing life-long cognitive delays and behavioral disorders. Lead exposure has also been linked to physical harm to children's immune, cardiovascular, and endocrine systems. Although health impacts are typically most severe in children, lead exposure has also been linked to negative health outcomes for adults, including cardiovascular and kidney disease. We also know that low-income residents are at heightened risk of lead exposure, and efforts to identify and mitigate sources of lead are a key part of addressing inequity in the District.

Thankfully, over the past several years, the District has made great strides in addressing the presence of lead in our residents' drinking water. In 2017, the Council passed—and you funded—the Childhood Lead Exposure Prevention Amendment Act, which has greatly reduced children's exposure to lead in drinking water at public schools, childcare centers, and recreation centers. The District has established and launched a childhood lead screening registry, and DC Water produces an online map to help customers identify whether their property is known to have lead service lines. Perhaps most importantly, we've passed legislation to require that DC Water remove and replace lead service lines on private property whenever they are replacing the portion of service line in public space, and created a relief fund to help residents cover the cost to remove partial lead service lines on their

property. These measures are poised to substantially reduce the risk of lead exposure to children and residents across the District.

Unfortunately, even with these policies and programs in place, there are still 20,000 residential and commercial buildings in the District that are served by water service lines that contain lead.<sup>1</sup> And, although DC Water has committed to replacing all lead service lines by 2030, the agency has not yet identified a source for 80% of the capital funding it needs to do this work. This lack of funding raises significant concerns regarding DC Water's ability to meet its commitment—concerns underscored by the pace at which the agency has been completing these replacements, to date. In FY 2020, DC Water completed 499 full lead water service line replacements, and received only 233 claims for reimbursement from residents who'd had a partial replacement on their property removed. At that pace, all full replacements will not be completed until 2042, and partial replacements by 2068. We cannot wait decades to address this critical health risk. Funds must be identified immediately to allow DC Water to remove and replace all lead service lines by 2030, as promised.

This need could be most effectively addressed by using the federal relief funds provided to the District under the American Rescue Plan. The Act specifically states that relief funds may be used to support water and sewer infrastructure projects, including replacement of lead water service lines—both the full and partial replacement programs. Earlier this month, DC Water General Manager David Gadis and Chairman of the DC Water Board of Directors Tommy Wells sent you a letter, requesting that approximately \$350 million of the District's federal relief funds be allocated to support DC Water's lead service line replacement work. We are writing to you today to express our support for their request.

Certainly, this is a large ask, but it is also an incredibly important one—not just in terms of protecting the health of our residents, but ensuring that water bills remain affordable for District ratepayers. Where the District does not utilize federal relief dollars to fund these lead service line replacement programs, it is unclear how DC Water will be able to cover those costs, absent a rate increase. With many residents and District business already struggling due to the public health emergency (not to mention increases to their water bills due to the CRIAC fee and other surcharges), we must make every effort to avoid a rate increase to pay for this work, while ensuring that it is completed in a timely fashion. Using federal relief dollars is the best way to accomplish both goals.

These federal funds represent a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the District to comprehensively address lead in our drinking water. Truly, this would be an investment in the future of our children, helping ensure that thousands of District youth are not put at risk of the negative mental and physical health effects that stem directly from lead exposure. Thus, we urge you to set aside \$350 million of the federal relief funds received by the District for these important lead service replacement programs.

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<sup>1</sup> According to DC Water, as of January 28<sup>th</sup> of this year, there are 10,487 properties in the District with a full lead water service line on their property, and 11,075 properties with partial lead water service lines on the private side of the property line.

Regards,



Councilmember Mary M. Cheh  
Ward 3  
Council of the District of Columbia



Councilmember Brianne Nadeau  
Ward 1  
Council of the District of Columbia



Councilmember Brooke Pinto  
Ward 2  
Council of the District of Columbia



Councilmember Janeese Lewis George  
Ward 4  
Council of the District of Columbia



Councilmember Charles Allen  
Ward 6  
Council of the District of Columbia



Councilmember Anita Bonds  
At-Large  
Council of the District of Columbia

Cc: General Manager Davis Gadis, DC Water

Cc: Chairman of the Board of Directors Tommy Wells, DC Water

Cc: Director Jenny Reed, Office of Budget and Performance Management

Cc: Chairman Phil Mendelson