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Welcome To Ohio
From the desk of Rep. McNally

Prioritizing Lead Water Line Replacement

As the State Representative for Ohio's 59th district, my job is to do the work at our statehouse so you can concentrate on the things that matter most to you. That means maintaining and improving public health and public safety. No amount of lead is safe and no one should ever have to worry about the safety of their drinking water.

When it comes to the government, it does not get more basic than the infrastructure that creates clean water. Clean water is the very essence of and fuel for our survival. It should be the bare minimum for the government to meet this basic need. Without it, the health outcomes and consequences are overwhelming and severe.

That is why these water systems are a public good and why we have to view lead water pipes as a collective problem, one that needs partnerships and cooperation to solve. I recently partnered with Ohio Environmental Council, Youngstown Health Department and State Representative Dontavius Jarrells to highlight this issue and HB 534, The Lead line Replacement Act.

The city of Youngstown has real challenges. We have thousands and thousands of existing pipes and fewer water system users because of our population loss. Those pipes are getting older while those users, who generate the dollars needed to address these infrastructure issues, are leaving. We are constantly financially struggling, receiving less and less in resources, while the strains become greater. That pinch harms our residents. Youngstown ranks 25th nationally for the most lead pipes in the nation and Ohio ranks 3rd. The scale of the problem is big.

And some problems are too big to tackle alone. We shouldn't expect cities and towns to take this on without support. Nationally, there are about 9 million lead pipes while, based on the age of our homes, the Youngstown Water Department estimates there are more than 12,000 lines. That correction cost, to an individual homeowner, could be anywhere from \$1300 - \$1800. So for the City of Youngstown, we're looking at a \$36 million dollar project.

That's just one community and not every town is at the same starting point in working to resolve this issue. Some cities, like Niles, still need to conduct an assessment. An assessment helps us learn how many lead lines we have. Without this necessary first step, Niles can't yet put a replacement plan together.

In May, as part of Biden's Investing in America Initiative, the federal government announced the dedication of nearly \$185 million dollars toward helping Ohio identify and replace lead service lines. There's also the Lead Pipe Action Plan. It spells out 15 specific actions that cities can take, while making help available from more than 10 federal agencies. This ensures the federal government is marshaling every resource to make rapid progress towards replacing all lead pipes in the next decade.

There's the Get the Lead out Initiative that takes lessons learned and best practices from the Lead Service Line Replacement Accelerators pilot program. This initiative expands that program to an additional 200 underserved and disadvantaged communities. It includes community engagement plans, helping identify lead lines and providing municipalities with a roadmap for 100% identification and full replacement of lead lines. That's public and private lines. When our local leaders request to participate in this program, they will also gain access to knowledge about:

How to address barriers

Current best practices

peer exchange

And learning

Additionally, there's Biden's Justice40 Initiative. It ensures that 40% of overall benefits from certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities, communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution. We know lead exposure disproportionately affects communities of color and low-income families. We know this issue is disproportionately affecting us in this region. This initiative is targeted at investing in us, and I'm grateful the Biden Administration sees us.

These federal goals are aggressive, as they should be. They are for the betterment of our lives. It is the strongest overhaul of lead rules in more than three decades and invests billions of dollars. The federal government is putting their money where the problem is. Since we should agree this is a problem for all of us to work together to resolve, it begs the question: what is the state doing to contribute.

Funded by the legislature using general revenue dollars, our H2Ohio program has invested \$21 million for critical water and sewer projects. We've invested \$4.5 million in lead service line mapping, \$1 million for drinking water equipment, \$3.2 million for lead service line and fixture replacement, and \$4.2 million for local health districts to replace household sewage treatment systems.

But let me remind you: projects for The City of Youngstown alone would cost more than this total investment.

I believe it is the government's job to help as many people as we can, to improve everyone's quality of life. We are all in this together. We should protect public health, create jobs, and ensure a healthy and safe future for Ohio families. I know the return on these investments speak for themselves. Fixing lead pipe infrastructure is a perfect example of how to give to each other, our neighbors, and get back so much more than we gave.

The federal government clearly shares this philosophy, that big problems take collaboration from all of us. It's why you see significant investment. But if you have a different philosophy, and you believe everyone is better off fending for themselves, that people are on their own when tackling big, multi million dollar problems created by an aging America, well you won't solve the problem. You will rank 3rd nationally in that problem. Ohio has a problem.

So what can we do and what is in our control. It's simple:



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First, if you're a city leader, make sure you're tapping into these federal programs and utilize them. They can get you the funding to get out the lead.

Second, the state is coming into the budget cycle. The Governor and his team are working on a first draft right now. Cities need to tell the state what these assessments and replacements will cost. Let the state know you need us as a partner. The state has the resources to do more. How it spends those resources is a decision about priorities. Let them know this is a priority in our communities.

I care enough about the prosperity of our communities, and spend enough time working in our neighborhoods, to know we can't waste time on this important upgrade to our infrastructure. It shouldn't take a chorus of voices to get the attention of my colleagues and help them to understand that this is urgent, but it does.

Join me in working to make our water work better for us. Support HB 534 by reaching out to the members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee at <https://ohiohouse.gov/committees/energy-and-natural-resources>

September 18, 2024, [Reps. McNally, Jarrells & Community Organizations Highlight Societal, Economic Benefits of Passing Lead Line Replacement Act in Youngstown](#)

