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## MADIGAN URGES PASSAGE OF BILL TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM LEAD IN DRINKING WATER

### *Legislation Requires Lead Testing in Schools and Day Cares Throughout Illinois*

**Chicago** — While appreciating a House committee's release of a bill to protect children from drinking water contaminated by lead, Attorney General Lisa Madigan urged concerned parties, especially schools and municipalities, to commit to pass the measure. The legislation was initiated by Madigan and the Illinois Environmental Council this past spring in response to alarming levels of lead found in water in many Chicago and suburban school districts. Lead exposure can have serious lifelong developmental impacts on children.

Senate Bill 550, sponsored by Sen. Heather Steans and Rep. Sonya Harper, passed the House Environment Committee 17-0. Due to extensive opposition, including from municipalities and water suppliers, however, the Committee required that the bill be held before it will be called for a vote in the full House.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is no safe level of lead in drinking water. Children are particularly vulnerable to lead exposure, which can lead to irreversible brain damage and lifelong intellectual, emotional and behavioral consequences. The Illinois Department of Public Health has found that Illinois has rates of lead exposure significantly higher than the national average.

Despite the high risks posed by drinking water contaminated with lead and Illinois' lead poisoning rates, state law does not require lead testing of drinking water in schools and day care centers.

In the last year, some Illinois schools that have voluntarily tested drinking water for lead had alarming results. Chicago Public Schools found elevated levels of lead in water fountains in more than 113 of the 327 schools tested. Test results from other school districts, including Glenview and St. Charles, also revealed drinking water sources with elevated lead levels.

The bill would require that all schools built before 2000 with pre-kindergarten through fifth grade classes test all water sources used for drinking or food preparation for lead. The measure also requires certain day care facilities to test water sources for lead. The bill is supported by the Illinois Sierra Club, Illinois PIRG, American Academy of Pediatrics of Illinois, Illinois PTA, Openlands, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization, Lake County Health Department, Cook County Department of Public Health, Northern Illinois Public Health Consortium, National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter, Center for Neighborhood Technology and Food & Water Watch.

"It is unconscionable that we are not conducting routine and inexpensive water testing to protect young children and infants from dangerous lead exposure, especially when our state has one of the highest lead exposure rates in the country," Madigan said. "No parent wants to inflict serious and lifelong developmental problems on their child that are easily prevented."

"This bill is an important first step that will identify lead contaminated infrastructure in Illinois, especially in schools and day cares. Our end goal is removal of lead from our drinking water system to ensure safe water for all Illinoisans," said Jen Walling, Executive Director of the Illinois Environmental Council.

The tests, which cost an average of \$15 per drinking water sample, would provide schools and day care centers with the information needed to quickly take simple steps to protect children from dangerous lead exposure. For example, water fountains with elevated lead levels can be turned off or flushed to address the problem. In addition to allowing schools and day cares to protect children immediately, the test results would guide schools and day cares in formulating a plan to prevent high lead levels from reoccurring.

"This is personal to me because my child attends a Chicago school that had lead-contaminated water," said state Representative Sonya Harper (D-Chicago). "I can tell you from first-hand experience that we need to identify and either fix or turn off these lead-contaminated fountains as quickly as possible. We can't bury our heads in the sand and pretend this isn't a problem in schools in this state."

"Before we can do anything else, we need to identify where Illinois children are consuming lead contaminated water," said state Senator Heather Steans (D-Chicago), the measure's chief Senate sponsor. "This legislation is a critical first step in addressing the problem of lead contamination once and for all."

Even though this legislation addresses alarming statistics that show dangerous lead exposure for Illinois children, opponents of the bill have slowed its passage through months of negotiations. The bill currently calls for municipal water suppliers to pay for the lead testing, but municipalities have stalled the bill because of their objections to paying for the tests, and schools are also unwilling to pay this cost. Notably, the bill does not mandate that municipal water suppliers or schools undertake the development of plans to change all the fixtures or pipes causing lead contamination, leaving that to future discussions.

In addition to requiring water testing for lead in all sources of drinking water in schools with pre-kindergarten through fifth grades and day cares, the legislation requires an inventory be taken of all lead service lines in the state that pose the risk of increased lead exposure in drinking water. Additionally, the bill would increase public notification of nearby water main construction projects that could impact water lines and increase the presence of lead in water.

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