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Reply contact: Deandrah Cameron, New Jersey Future Policy Manager, dcameron@njfuture.org

December 18, 2025

Re: Request for Information and Meeting – Water Infrastructure Grants – Securing Our Children’s Future Bond Act

Dear Commissioner Dehmer,

We applaud the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) for [extending the application for school districts to access more than \\$94 million in funding](#) through the *Securing Our Children’s Future Bond Act* (P.L. 2018, c.119) to November 28. The provision of this long-awaited funding presents the opportunity for school districts to access critical resources needed to protect students from lead and other harmful contaminants in drinking water. As you know, under the *Securing Our Children’s Future Bond Act* (P.L. 2018, c.119), \$100 million fund was originally announced in 2019, yet only \$6.6 million was spent in the first application cycle, and the second round of funding was made available for school applications from June 2025 – November 2025.

NJ schools need lead in drinking water remediation. Due to the aging infrastructure of NJ schools, lead plumbing, which can leach into the drinking water, is widespread. When schools identify elevated lead levels in drinking water, they often shut off access to the water source instead of remediating it. This practice limits student and staff access to water, which is especially concerning given that \$94 million is currently available to remediate these drinking water sources.

Communities in which our Lead-Free NJ community hubs are located, Trenton, Paterson, and Orange, are among the highest lead-impacted areas in the state. All three areas had elevated levels of lead identified in school drinking water during the 2024-2025 testing cycle. Trenton Public School District [test results from 2024](#) show that the highest level of lead found was 280 ppb at Carroll Robbins Elementary – this is more than 18 times higher than the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) Action Level of 15 parts per billion (ppb). Orange [reporting](#) indicates that the schools have disconnected the water source to address drinking water outlets with high lead levels, thereby limiting access to drinking water. Paterson [test results from](#) this school year indicate that seven schools had water outlets with lead levels exceeding the USEPA and NJDEP Action Levels. **We are very encouraged to hear that Paterson is applying for the remediation funding.**

As members of [Lead-Free NJ](#) (LFNJ), a statewide collaborative working to eliminate lead exposure with a focus on racial and economic equity, we respectfully request that NJDOE respond to the following inquiries:

- How many school districts applied to the *Securing Our Children’s Future Bond Act* Water Infrastructure Grants by the November 28, 2025, deadline? Which schools applied?
- When does NJDOE anticipate providing a comprehensive list of projects eligible for grant

funding to the New Jersey State Legislature for approval? (Pursuant to section 4.f. of the Bond Act)

- Will NJDOE make another round of funding available?
- What is NJDOE's plan to implement the \$2 million grant program for public schools to purchase and install point-of-use filtered bottle-filling stations and filtered faucets under P.L.2025, c.76? Can we expect a program to be in place by January 2026, as mandated by the law? Will NJDOE coordinate this program with the Securing Our Children's Future Bond Act?
- What are the barriers that NJDOE and NJ schools face in implementing this funding?
- Will the NJDOE and NJDEP partner to centralize the reporting of school lead in drinking water test results, thereby improving access to information for staff, students, and parents?
- Will remediating lead in school drinking water be a priority for the Gubernatorial administration transition?

Lead-Free NJ and its stakeholders request a meeting with NJDOE to follow up on our inquiries above and to explore collaboration to eliminate lead in school drinking water. Additionally, we respectfully urge the Department to consider supporting school districts through outreach, education, and technical assistance that provides the necessary guidance to improve the number and viability of applications. For more detailed points, [please see our letter sent on October 2, 2025](#).

Thank you for your consideration and leadership.

Sincerely,

Debbie Mans, Steering Committee Co-Chair, Lead-Free NJ

Yvette Jordan, Advocacy Coordinating Committee Co-Chair, Lead-Free NJ & Chair Emeritus, Newark Education Workers Caucus

Rachel Dawn Davis, Water Advocacy Committee Co-Chair, Lead-Free NJ & Public Policy & Justice Organizer, Waterspirit

Shereyl Snider, Lead-Free NJ Community Hub in Trenton, & Community Organizer, East Trenton Collaborative

Shanikwa Lemon, Lead-Free NJ Community Hub in Paterson, & Executive Director, Paterson Alliance

Lavon Boykins, Lead-Free NJ Community Hub in Orange, & Community Fellow, The HUUB