



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting House Bill 6761, An Act Concerning A
Review of Drinking Water Supply Locations and Equipment in Public
Schools**

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty,
and members of the Environment Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in support of House Bill 6761, An Act Concerning A Review of Drinking Water Supply Locations and Equipment in Public Schools.

The ACLU-CT believes that all children deserve access to education in buildings where children can thrive and have their basic health needs met with potable drinking water, functioning air conditioning, and proper ventilation. Because of systemic racism and systemic inequity, the students who do not have access to these basic necessities are most often kids from low-income families and kids of color.

Environmental racism has a long history in this state and country. Robert Bullard, a giant in the field of environmental justice, wrote “[h]istorically, toxic dumping and the location of locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) have followed the ‘path of least resistance,’ meaning [B]lack and poor communities have been disproportionately burdened.”¹ Factors like proximity to highways, industrial businesses, and other sources of pollution and hazardous waste, have direct and scientifically-proven harms to public health.² Centuries of exclusionary zoning and racist covenants prevented

¹ Danyelle Solomon & Tracey Ross, *Protecting America from Racism in the Water*, CTR. AM. PROGRESS (Feb. 3, 2016), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/protecting-america-from-racism-in-the-water/>.

² *Id.*

people of color from accessing housing in communities further away from these externalities.³ The effects of exclusionary zoning are still felt today. Data from a 2016-2019 Environmental Protection Agency review of the public water systems that consistently violate the Safe Drinking Water Act are 40 percent more likely to serve people of color.⁴ Noncompliant systems also take longer to return to compliance when they are among communities of color. When water systems systemically fail to provide drinking water to communities of color, these same communities are less likely to trust whether their water is, in fact, clean.⁵ This has a direct, disproportionate financial impact on people of color: 55 percent of Black households and 44 percent of Latinx households report only drinking bottled water at home.⁶ In contrast, only 28 percent of white households drink only bottled water, and they are more likely to also purchase less bottled water and drink unfiltered tap water than others.⁷

School districts serving communities of color and low-income communities are more likely to have aging, underdeveloped, and underfunded water systems.⁸ According to the Centers for Disease Control, children are more easily exposed to environmental contaminants for a variety of reasons, including that they drink more water per pound of body weight than adults and that children are less able to break down and dispose of harmful contaminants.⁹ Exposure to lead-contaminated water can cause significant health problems, like anemia, kidney and brain damage, developmental disabilities, and decreased growth.¹⁰ A report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that 41 percent of school districts, accounting for 12 million children, had

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Communities of Color More Likely to Suffer Drinking Water Violations For Years*, NAT'L RESOURCE DEFENSE COUNCIL (Sept. 14, 2019), <https://www.nrdc.org/media/2019/190924>.

⁵ Daphne Ewing-Chow, *A Recent Survey Casts New Light on America's Racial Divide in Clean Tap Water Access*, FORBES (Feb. 28, 2021), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/daphneewingchow/2021/02/28/a-recent-survey-casts-new-light-on-americas-racial-and-water-divide/?sh=281cfe3821a6>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ NRDC, *supra* note 4.

⁹ *Children's Environmental Health*, CTRS. DISEASE CONTROL (accessed Feb. 28, 2023), <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/tracking/topics/ChildrensEnvironmentalHealth.htm/>.

¹⁰ *Protecting Children From Lead Exposure in Schools and Child Care Facilities*, U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF. (Oct. 27, 2020), <https://www.gao.gov/blog/protecting-children-lead-exposure-schools-and-child-care-facilities>.

not tested for lead in 2016 or 2017, and another 16 percent of schools did not know whether a lead test occurred.¹¹ Of the schools that did test for lead, 37 percent found that there were elevated lead levels in their water.¹² In Connecticut, one study found that of the few schools that tested for lead, 43 percent had high levels of lead between 2000 and 2015.¹³

House Bill 6761 is an important measure in addressing the racial and income disparities in the quality of drinking water in schools. The bill requires local and regional boards of education to conduct tests of drinking water supply and locations in all school facilities and provides an avenue for schools whose water systems do not live up to standards to obtain a grant to remediate its infrastructure. The ACLU-CT supports House Bill 6761, and urges this Committee to do the same.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Lead in Schools' Water*, U.S. PIRG ED. FUND (July 26, 2022), <https://pirg.org/edfund/resources/lead-in-schools-water/>.