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Statement to Congress on Contaminated Drinking Water in Flint, Michigan

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My home used to be a place of comfort and safety for my family. It used to be what a home should be: a place of peace and protection from the outside world.

That was taken from us -- and not just from my family but from every home and every citizen in Flint.

Now my home is known as "ground zero."

The people in Flint now stand with the people in D.C. who suffered their own lead crisis a decade ago -- because we now know the horror of poison running through our taps and the negligence of the agencies paid to protect us.

In 2014, in a city with no democracy, forced under an emergency manager handpicked by Governor Snyder, a decision was made to switch the water source without the proper testing and enforcement of regulation.



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The MDEQ [Michigan Department of Environmental Quality] claims they misinterpreted federal law regarding corrosion control. They were allowed to tell EPA they were following the law without any verifications. The citizens in Flint were assured for 18 months that the water was safe.

My home was being tested because of the discoloration of my water and the health issues my family was experiencing. We fought the city and the state, saying there was something wrong, and we were dismissed.

I decided we need[ed] to get to the science if anyone was ever going to believe us. I started researching and educating myself about water. I had three tests done by the city of Flint, using extra steps that tend to minimize lead in water. Those numbers were: 104 parts per billion, 397 parts per billion, and 707 parts per billion.

I contacted the EPA and started working with Miguel Del Toral and Jennifer Crooks at the EPA. Mr. Del Toral was very thorough and knowledgeable in assisting me. I told Mr. Del Toral I did not believe there was corrosion control in the water, provided him documentation about this fact, and he verified my findings -- and he was furious.

Mr. Del Toral questioned the MDEQ -- and at first they lied -- and then later admitted the truth. I figured out that Ms. Crooks was aiding the MDEQ with her lies, and Mr. Del Toral was the only one willing to address the problem. I requested a copy of Mr. Del Toral's report, and I made it public because people had a right to know.

With the report public, Susan Hedman, EPA, apologized to the Mayor of Flint and to the MDEQ -- because of policy.

No one but Mr. Del Toral was willing to do their job. Mr. Del Toral was told by the ethics attorney to forward all media requests, including those during his personal time. He was also advised not to talk about -- about Flint, or to anyone from Flint. In a meeting I had with MDEQ, Liane Schekter Smith bragged to me about how Mr. Del Toral had been "handled," that his report was flawed, and that there would be no final report.

This was the ultimate betrayal for the citizens. Susan Hedman cared more about policy than the welfare of an entire community, while punishing and silencing the one person that was willing to help us.



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I started doing independent testing with Virginia Tech, and 30 tests were done -- tests that were performed in accordance to the LCR [Lead and Copper Rule]. My average was 2500 parts per billion. My highest was 13,500 parts per billion. Hazardous waste is 5,000. Regardless of this information and the fact that my son had lead poisoning, the city and the MDEQ still continued to tell everyone the water was safe, as the EPA sat by and watched in silence.

Because the state and federal governments failed us, with the help of Virginia Tech, we conducted citizen-based samplings. We educated and distributed 300 samples equally throughout the city. We collected back 277 samples. All of this was done in a three week turnaround.

Here are the facts.

After the tragedy in D.C., from 2001 to 2006, where children were poisoned by lead and water, the EPA should have immediately closed the loopholes to protect all citizens. Had the EPA closed the loopholes, then it could have 100% prevented what just took place in Flint. EPA has failed to protect people by refusing to ban partial lead service line replacements. The EPA's LCR national report from 2006 states that the "lack of system response" for lead "exceedances" is "especially true...to inform the public." It is done "less than one third of the time."

From my research I have found that this is not a Flint problem or a rare anomaly. This is a national problem. Only 10 states test accurately and according to the LCR. Twenty-one states do not reveal their sampling instructions. And 19 states have testing similar to loopholes to the Michigan ones.

There is no justifiable reason for testing with loopholes -- except to hide lead. These loopholes that need to be eliminated are: preflush, small mouth bottles, and cap on stagnation.

I spoke against the NDWAC [National Drinking Water Advisory Council] recommendations that we -- that are now currently under advisement by the EPA to change the LCR. These recommendations will weaken an already broken system, and I'm outraged that the EPA continues to allow this type of dishonesty with testing to continue nationally.

The citizens in Flint are relying on each of you because we have no choice. We trust no one but Virginia Tech. There are people in Flint today still not being assisted during this crisis: illegal immigrants, disabled, and shut-ins. Broken policy and procedures are smothering the outcry of entire communities suffering financially, physically, mentally, and emotionally.



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I urge you to help restore some of the trust lost and protect all the citizens in the United States by never allowing this to happen again.

We need this to happen now -- not 10 years from now.

Thank you.