



*Maine State Legislature  
Augusta, Maine 04333-0002*

July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015

Mary Mayhew, Commissioner  
Maine Department of Health and Human Services  
221 State Street  
Augusta, ME 04333-0040

Dear Commissioner Mayhew,

We are concerned about arsenic and other toxic chemicals in private well water. It threatens the health of thousands of Maine families and greatly increases the risk that children will develop learning disabilities and even cancer.

As you know, Maine has the highest reliance on well water of any state in the nation, and yet only 45% of Mainers test their well water for harmful chemicals such as arsenic. The Maine CDC has a stated goal to increase this rate to 65% by 2020. With arsenic currently poisoning the drinking water of roughly 150,000 Maine residents, increasing awareness is paramount.

We were discouraged and alarmed by the Maine Sunday Telegram report that DHHS denied the Maine CDC's request to reapply for a 2-year federal CDC grant of \$300,000 to increase the state testing rate. This decision comes on the heels of the Governor's veto of LD 1162, a bill with strong business support that would have supplied an additional \$75,000 in funds for education and outreach activities around well water safety. With neither state nor federal funds allocated to programming proactively reaching Maine families about the need to test, we worry that the water testing goal of 65% by 2020 will be out of reach.

It is disappointing that the Maine CDC spent two years building capacity and materials under its initial grant, to see this work come to an abrupt end by August 31st. This initial grant showed promising results; the CDC used these funds to do events, earn media attention, and distribute information to households in vulnerable communities. We were further concerned to learn that the CDC was not permitted to fully carry out an activity that involved the distribution of free water test kits to households, before being able to completely find out how well that tactic works to improve testing rates. We want to make sure that the Maine CDC has the freedom and the resources to continue exploring what works best to raise awareness.

Strong scientific evidence revealed that 272 Kennebec County children had elevated arsenic in their drinking water and experienced significantly lower IQ scores



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compared with their peers with low exposure. It is for this reason, we feel it is time to double down on our efforts, not cut them short.

With our sights on reaching the goal of 65% testing rate by 2020, we are requesting an outline of your plan to reach this goal by Monday August 10th (two weeks before the end of the current grant period). It would be most helpful for this plan to include the specific outreach tactics that will be deployed and how resources will be reallocated to this programming.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss how we can address this critical issue, and we truly hope that we can work together to optimize a solution for a very important problem facing Mainers.

Sincerely,

Representative Drew Gattine  
Representative Karen Vachon  
Representative Gary Hilliard  
Senator Anne Haskell  
Senator Chris Johnson  
Senator Amy Volk

cc: Kenneth Albert, Director and Chief Operating Officer  
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention