



# At Water Policy Conference, Duckworth Calls Attention to Environmental, Health and Justice Crises

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– Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) delivered remarks at the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies’ 2019 Water Policy Conference, detailing the importance of ensuring every American has access to affordable clean water. Duckworth went on to outline her agenda for water policies in the 116th Congress, stressing the need to view access to clean water as not just an environmental or health priority, but as a matter of justice, fairness and equality, too.

**“Every American has a right to clean water, no matter their zip code, the color of their skin or the size of their income,” Duckworth said. “You don’t need to be a policy wonk, or a Democrat, to get why this issue’s important: no elementary-schooler should be scared to drink out of their school fountain at recess. This is a matter of justice, and it’s a crisis that I will never stop working to end—one bill passed, one water fountain tested, one child saved at a time.”**

As ranking member of the Senate Environment & Public Works Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water and Wildlife, Duckworth has been outspoken about the need to reduce human exposure to toxic poisons like lead and has introduced several pieces of legislation addressing the issue. In September of last year, U.S. Senator Todd Young (R-IN) and Congressman Dan Kildee (D-MI) joined Duckworth in [introducing](#) the *Get the Lead Out of Assisted Housing Act*. The legislation would protect families from lead exposure by requiring the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) to inspect for lead service lines, create a grant program to address lead contamination and allow a cross-check for lead in water when remediating a home for lead found in paint.

She also [introduced](#) the *Get the Lead Out of Schools Act* with U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) to ensure periodic testing for lead contamination in drinking water at schools

while also providing schools with additional resources to monitor lead levels and replace outdated water infrastructure systems.

Duckworth's remarks as prepared are below.

Hello, everyone. Thank you for having me here this afternoon.

Today's actually a special day for me—it's my younger daughter's first birthday!

Being a mom has changed who I am and how I see the world.

And I'm positive that it's made me a better legislator, too... making me better able to understand the needs of parents nationwide, whose greatest hope in the world is for their kids to be healthy.

I still remember sitting in a House Oversight Committee hearing a few years back, on the topic of the Flint water crisis.

At the time, my older daughter was just a year old. I remember looking out into the audience and seeing a mom holding a baby bottle that looked exactly like the one my baby drank out of... a little bottle, with a pink top.

But unlike my daughter's, the water in this bottle was brown. *Brown*.

I couldn't—and all these years later, still can't—begin to imagine what it would've been like to have to drink that water while I was pregnant.

Or to have no choice but to give it to my baby, because I couldn't afford safe drinking water.

But that kind of nightmare remains everyday reality for far, far too many parents across this country.

It's been five years since the city of Flint tried to save a few dollars by swapping out its drinking water supply from Detroit's system to Flint River... setting off a chain of events that poisoned nearly 9,000 kids in just 18 months, as too many elected officials covered their eyes to the crisis at hand.

Yet to this day, some at the EPA and elsewhere in the Administration are repeating past sins:

Sitting idly by as countless more Americans are exposed to pollutants whenever they take a sip from the tap...

As more than 6 million homes continue getting water from lead service lines...

And as roughly half a million kids under the age of 6 have elevated levels of lead in their blood.

Let's be clear. For children, there's no safe level of lead allowable in drinking water.

Even low levels can cause them permanent brain damage, lowering IQ and inflicting other cognitive damage.

Imagine if your child was one of those who'd gotten sick because the EPA refused to take action on such obvious crises.

Imagine how devastating that would be.

As a mom, this breaks my heart.

As a Senator, this makes me furious.

And as the ranking member on the EPW subcommittee with oversight of these issues, you better believe I'm going to try to do something about it.

Every American has a right to clean water... no matter their zip code, the color of their skin or the size of their income.

That's why I've been pushing forward a water agenda that focuses on three issues: access, quality and affordability.

I've reached across the aisle, pleading with colleagues to see this as a bipartisan issue... working with folks from both parties to fix this country's water infrastructure... and to introduce legislation like:

The *NO LEAD Act*, which would require the EPA to better regulate lead in drinking water and ensure that testing results are more readily available to the public.

Or the *Get the Lead Out of Assisted Housing Act*, which would protect low-income families through more frequent, more thorough testing.

Or the *Great Lakes Water Protection Act*, which would ban sewage-dumping into the Basin...

because it's horrifying that every year, 22 billion gallons of untreated sewage and stormwater get funneled into the same bodies of water that supply drinking water to 30 million people.

And I've written—repeatedly—to Trump's EPA, demanding that they finally do something to actually protect Americans from getting sick from our water.

You know, something other than rolling back the WOTUS rule...

Something other than choosing corporate polluters over our families, making it easier for companies to contaminate the systems we depend on for clean water.

Progress here hasn't been easy, and it hasn't been quick. But we are moving forward—and that's thanks in part to partners like you.

Last October, Senator Durbin and I helped secure \$4.4 billion to help communities in Illinois and nationwide modernize their drinking water systems.

We got an additional \$10 million to help schools test for lead in their drinking water.

I'm also working to reauthorize the Clean Water SRF and plan to introduce the *Water Quality Protection and Job Creation Act of 2019*...

Which would funnel more federal dollars into fixing our wastewater infrastructure, making it both more resilient in the face of disasters and more affordable for all communities... creating good-paying jobs along the way.

It would also deliver critical assistance to all you here today... helping you meet the needs of your customers with cost-effective, reliable solutions.

Listen, you don't need to be a policy wonk—or a Democrat—to get why this issue's important.

Because while Flint was a tragedy, it was not an anomaly.

No elementary-schooler should be scared to drink out of their school fountain at recess.

No father should worry about giving his child water out of the kitchen tap before bedtime.

No mother should have to hold a bottle full of brown water up to her baby's lips.

This is a matter of health and safety.

It's is a matter of systemic racism, and of discrimination against those in poorer neighborhoods.

It's a matter of justice... and it's a crisis that, with your help, I will *never* stop working to end. One bill passed, one water fountain tested, one child saved at a time.

Thank you. And with that, I'm happy to answer a few questions...