Bill No.: SB-814
Title: AN ACT REQUIRING BOARDS OF EDUCATION TO CONDUCT TESTING OF WATER SUPPLIES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR THE PRESENCE OF LEAD.
Vote Date: 3/6/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Public Health
PH Date: 2/22/2019
File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:
In light of the recent events of water contamination in Flint, Michigan, the public has assumed a heightened awareness to the dangers of drinking water and lead contamination. Lead poisoning can cause lifelong brain damage and is a significant pediatric problem in Connecticut. This bill would be a precautionary measure to stop lead poisoning in drinking water in schools.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:
Commissioner, Raul Pino, Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH): The Department of Public Health, through federal guidelines called the Lead and Copper Rule (LCR), regulates approximately 170 public schools and the remaining schools are customers of water suppliers which are also regulated by the DPH under LCR federal guidelines. A pilot program to identify and eliminate lead poisoning has already been established in Bridgeport, Hartford, Meriden, New Haven, and Waterbury where the children have been identified as being most vulnerable to lead poisoning. DPH continues to seek federal funds to expand said pilot program to increase water testing for lead. At this time, DPH cannot divert from their general funds toward lead testing of drinking water in schools without additional funding.

Commissioner, Dianna R. Wentzell, State of Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE): SDE supports efforts to ensure safe drinking water for students but states that the regulation of drinking water should be handled by the DPH.
NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Senator, Majority Leader, Bob Duff:
Senator Duff supports this bill. Senator Duff cites DPH studies which have identified the health effects of lead poisoning including reduced IQ, behavioral problems, and damage to the nervous system. Childhood lead poisoning is the most common pediatric problem in Connecticut. Since 2010 twenty Connecticut schools have been tested positive for lead poisoning, but the number may be much higher because only one hundred seventy out of one thousand one hundred schools are required by the state to test for lead. Recently, New Haven took initiative to test their water and found lead levels three times above Federal limit. Given this finding, all schools should test their water for lead.

Senator, Cathy Osten:
Senator Osten supports this bill. Lead contamination is important for buildings built before 1986 which were frequently built with lead. Senator Osten underlines the importance of this bill by citing the case of the Hebron Elementary School which tested positive for lead. Senator Osten especially supports the provision of this bill that allows school district to apply for state grants which would take major financial pressure off of local boards of education.

Executive Director, Elizabeth Gara, Connecticut Water Works Association, (CWWA):
Executive Director Gara supports this bill. Executive Director Gara claims that public water supplies, residential properties, and their related piping have already been tested under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. Although efforts have been made to minimize lead contamination; water fountains, school piping, and water use patterns can lead to lead contamination in public school water sources. CWWA supports the testing of these water sources and recommends that all pieces of water fountains model numbers be cross referenced with DPH who would remove said models which contain lead. CWWA continues to work to improve the implementation of the Lead and Copper Rule (LCR).

President, Mary Yordon, Norwalk Federation of Teachers, AFT-CT 1723, AFL-CIO:
President Yordan supports this bill. President Yordan states that children should not be exposed to lead contamination in drinking water. Additionally, President Yordan states that the Norwalk Public Schools have already tested for lead in 2016 and hopes that those tests would be sufficient in fulfilling water testing requirements outlined in this bill to avoid redundancy.

Superintendent, Co-Chair, Matthew Conway, Derby Public Schools, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents:
Superintendent Conway supports this bill. Superintendent Conway claims that it only costs $475.00 to test a public school for lead contamination in their drinking water. If lead contamination is ignored, the cost of remediation will be vastly more expensive.

Orlando Rodriguez, Connecticut Education Association (CEA):
CEA supports this bill. Lead exposure to children leads to lower test scores, aggressive and criminal behavior, and a heightened chance of acquiring Alzheimer’s disease later in life. The federal ban in 1986 banned lead pipes, but did not require that the lead pipes be removed from old buildings. In addition, CEA is concerned about dangerous mold in schools and requests that this bill be expanded to include mold exposure in schools.
NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc. (CABE):
CABE requests that this bill be amended that if a BOE has recently tested a school for lead contamination then they will not be required to do so again.

Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM):
CCM has concerns with this bill. CCM claims that this may lead to an unfunded mandate on municipalities and many municipalities have already taken steps to test their schools for lead poisoning.

Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASB):
CASB opposes this bill. CASB opposes this bill because they claim that water testing should be performed by DPH and that this bill would become a costly unfunded mandate on boards of education.

Reported by: Colin Carroll  Date: 3/26/19