

Testimony of Shelby Reitz
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Parent, Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan
Committee on Transportation & the Environment
Budget Oversight Hearing on the Department of General Services
April 22, 2016

I am a parent of two children at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan, which has students from every ward. My family lives in Ward 6. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

You will hear from several CHML parents today, and I'm sure you have heard through your fellow Councilmembers that the presence of lead in our water sources is a major issue of concern for us. It's an issue that intersects with our modernization goal, but more importantly, it goes to the heart of DC's ethical obligation to provide a safe environment for the students in its facilities. Our building is bad and DGS's conduct is making matters infinitely worse.

The data on this issue is difficult to parse. If it would be helpful, I would like to provide a brief summary of the lead testing at CHML in the past year:

- In August 2015, DGS tested nine of the 77 water sources at our school. Three of the nine sources showed lead levels above DGS's own 15ppb limit, including one sample at roughly 20 times that limit. DGS did not notify Principal Eatman or parents of the results.
- In March 2016, DGS tested six water sources at our school. It is not clear whether they re-tested the sources that showed lead in excess of 15ppb at the August 2015 test. DGS did not notify Principal Eatman or parents of the results.
- School staff first learned of the issue in April 2015 via a blog post on [educationdc.net](https://educationdc.net/2016/04/04/putting-the-lead-in-dc-education-leaders/) (<https://educationdc.net/2016/04/04/putting-the-lead-in-dc-education-leaders/>), which linked to the original August 2015 data posted on the Department of Energy and Environment's website. Personally, I learned about it from my five-year-old.
- Our PTSO immediately contacted the DOEE. Within two hours, the August results disappeared from the website and were replaced by the March results.
- The PTSO then requested a community meeting with DGS to discuss the lead issue. Two weeks in advance of the meeting, we provided DGS with a list of specific questions we wanted answered.
- On April 14, CHML parents and students testified before the Education Committee. In response to testimony about the lead problem, Chairman Grosso requested that DGS return to the school and test **all** water sources.
- DGS did return to the school for additional testing on April 14. They tested 57 of the 77 water sources. Two new sources, neither of which were previously tested, showed lead levels in excess of 15ppb, including one source in the nap room where our very

youngest students spend their entire afternoons. The nap room source measured 110ppb, roughly seven times DGS's limit for safe drinking.

- Our community meeting with DGS occurred on Wednesday of this week. DGS failed to meaningfully answer any of our questions. We have asked DGS for additional testing and follow-up. Another meeting is scheduled for May 4.

This chronology shows several glaring problems. First and foremost, in the last year, there has been dangerous amounts of lead in at least five water sources at a school. Four of these are unquestionably sources that are regularly used by children. At our meeting, DGS spokesman Kenneth Diggs repeatedly referred to how DGS is responding to lead "in the current environment," referring to recent events in Flint, Michigan. There is no "current environment." Lead is dangerous to children. Period. We have known that for a hundred years.

Second, DGS failed to communicate the results to **anyone**. Their failure to inform the school or its families means that parents lost the opportunity to test their children and seek treatment if necessary. If a child was exposed in August, the damage is done. Wednesday's meeting was an exasperating two hours of non-information, but Mr. Diggs did provide one – and only one – clear and concrete answer. When asked if our principal or parents were informed of the testing results, he answered, "No. That was not our policy." Let me repeat that: it was the policy of DC's general contractor **not to inform any of the interested parties when children had been exposed to a toxic substance.**

Third, DGS's process is fundamentally broken. Our experience shows that there is no comprehensive testing program. We have 77 water sources. In August, DGS tested nine of them. In March, they tested six of them. Since the results came to light this month, DGS has heard repeated calls for comprehensive testing. Our PTSO sent DGS a list of questions we expected answers to at the community meeting. One of the questions was, "Can you test all our water sources (fountains, sinks, outside), since our kids use sinks for daily lessons and activities, and our garden is used for fruits and veggies that students eat?" In addition to that written request, several of our students and parents testified about the issue at the April 14 Education Committee meeting. At that meeting, Chairman Grosso expressly told us that DGS would be sent back to do a thorough job. He stated: "We've asked DGS to go back out, and they're going this morning, to test EVERY SINGLE WATER SOURCE in the school... They've assured me they will look at all of the fountains, all of the sinks, all of the kitchen work [sinks], all of them."

Despite the early test results – despite our written request – despite express instruction from the Chairman of the Education Committee – DGS **still** failed to test all water sources. Their April 14 tests apparently covered only 57 of the 77 sources. This is inexplicable.

The data we do have is unclear. DGS does not provide a clear or consistent identifier for each source. Our parents have asked whether the kitchen water is safe, and we can't honestly tell them. Is "Basement floor in Kitchen (left)" a food prep sink? A dishwashing stand? A water fountain? The same water fountain may be identified as something different from test to test simply because a different technician conducted the second test. This means the data is both inscrutable and unreliable.

None of our interactions with DGS have given us any faith in their oversight. When we requested a meeting, they were aware we were concerned. We provided them with specific questions in advance. And yet they failed to provide any meaningful answers. They did not provide evidence that any of the problematic sources was actually remediated. They handed us new data (covering 57 sources) mid-way through the meeting. It was immediately apparent that two new sources were identified as having high levels of lead. DGS had assured us their policy was to "immediately" shut down any source showing elevated levels of lead, and leave the source off until it could be re-tested with a filter, eight to sixteen hours later. When we saw the data, a parent simply walked down the hall to check on those two just-identified sources. No surprise – the sink in the nap room was still operating.

If I hired a private contractor to work on my home, and he conducted his work in this manner, I would fire him and sue him for negligence. If a child was exposed to lead in a private home, DC would conduct a comprehensive inspection, provide remediation orders, and fine the homeowner if they failed to complete the remediation. The District's public contractor – charged with maintaining the schools, parks, and municipal facilities that citizens use every day – should be held to the same standard.

Exhibit 1

Excerpt of Lead Test Results

Tests conducted at CHM@L in August 2015 and March 2016

Excerpt of lead test results from the Department of Energy & Environment

<http://doee.dc.gov/publication/water-sampling-results-district-schools>.

Note: We created the matrix below to correlate the results from 2015 and 2106.

August 20, 2015	Pass	Fail	March 28, 2016	Pass	Fail
First Floor Hallway Adjacent to Rm 109	<1		1st floor hallway adjacent to Classroom 109	< 1	
First Floor Hallway Adjacent to Rm 109	<1		1st floor hallway adjacent to Classroom 109	< 1	
Second Floor Hallway Adjacent to Rm 212	<1		Not functioning at time of test		
Second Floor Hallway Adjacent to Rm 212	<1		Not functioning at time of test		
Second Floor Hallway Adjacent to Rm 202 (high)	<1		Not functioning at time of test		
Second Floor Hallway Adjacent to Rm 202 (low)	1.5		Not functioning at time of test		
Second Floor Hallway Adjacent to Rm 202 (low)	<1		Not functioning at time of test		
Second Floor Hallway Adjacent to Rm 202 (low)	2.2		Not functioning at time of test		
First Floor Hallway Adjacent to Rm 101	<1		1st floor hallway adjacent to Classroom 101	< 1	
First Floor Hallway Adjacent to Rm 101	<1		1st floor hallway adjacent to Classroom 101	< 1	
First Floor Hallway Between restrooms (left)		15	1st floor hallway in Annex Building adjacent to Women's room (left, high)	< 1	
First Floor Hallway Between restrooms (left)		15	1st floor hallway in Annex Building adjacent to Women's room (left, high)	< 1	
First Floor Hallway Between restrooms (middle)		16	1st floor hallway in Annex Building adjacent to Women's room (middle, low)	< 1	
First Floor Hallway Between restrooms (middle)	13		1st floor hallway in Annex Building adjacent to Women's room (middle, low)	< 1	
First Floor Hallway Between restrooms (right)		320	1st floor hallway in Annex Building adjacent to Women's room (right, high)	< 1	
First Floor Hallway Between restrooms (right)	9.7		1st floor hallway in Annex Building adjacent to Women's room (right, high)	< 1	
First Floor inside cafeteria	<1		Basement floor inside Cafeteria	< 1	
First Floor inside cafeteria	4		Basement floor inside Cafeteria	< 1	

Exhibit 2

Lead Tests Results Provided by DGS on April 20, 2016