



MILWAUKEE DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

Members of the Wisconsin State Assembly and the Wisconsin State Senate

February 12, 2018

Secretary Linda Seemeyer
Department of Health Services
1 W. Wilson Street
Madison, WI 53703

HAND DELIVERED

Dear Secretary Seemeyer,

We're writing to urge the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) to take decisive action to address the lead crisis affecting Milwaukee's children. It is our understanding that there are significant, unspent resources—**\$3.9 million**—in the SNAP Education (SNAP-ED) program administered by DHS, and that allocation of this funding towards educating families in the Milwaukee area regarding the dangers of toxic lead and steps that they can take to protect their children's developing brains has been inexplicably *reduced*.

Worse still, this reduction comes after Milwaukee legislators contacted DHS Director Lisa Murphy last summer to express our concerns with Wisconsin's proportional allocation of SNAP-ED funding, whereby Milwaukee County, **home to 35% of all SNAP recipients, received only 7% of the total statewide SNAP-ED funding**. This is clearly inequitable, but it is all the more indefensible considering the demonstrated need for nutritional education in Milwaukee.

Lead poisoning is a serious public health threat in the state of Wisconsin, and especially within the city of Milwaukee, which has the largest concentration of lead service lines in the state as well as aging housing stock. A recent Milwaukee Health Department report shows that from 2015-2017, a shocking 8,455 children in the city were found to have elevated blood lead levels (EBLLs) above 5ug/dl. For this same period, 83 children were found to have EBLLs above 40ug/dl. As you know, damage from toxic lead is irreversible, so prevention and reduction of harm initiatives must be prioritized if we are going to avoid billions of dollars in lifelong public expenditures for child victims of this toxin.

The USDA-supported *Well Fed Means Less Lead* series would be an appropriate and timely source for a portion of the **\$3.9 million** in SNAP-ED funding that went unspent in the prior fiscal year. DHS has, for years, been aware that toxic lead exposures in Milwaukee children are being found at a rate nearly double that of Flint, MI, and yet millions of dollars have gone unspent to help educate the nearly 35% of SNAP recipients who reside in Milwaukee County on the dangers of toxic lead.



MILWAUKEE DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

Members of the Wisconsin State Assembly and the Wisconsin State Senate

Congresswoman Gwen Moore has also recently written to the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), calling on them to immediately invest Wisconsin's unallocated but available SNAP-ED money into Milwaukee, and we echo both her request and her urgency for a similar response from DHS.

As was done in Flint, increasing access to nutrition education resources and commodity foods high in the three key nutrients known to mitigate lead absorption—Vitamin C, Calcium, and Iron—should be a part of any public health program hoping to educate Wisconsin's SNAP recipients in places like Milwaukee.

Given these urgent needs and the multimillion dollar balance in Wisconsin's SNAP-ED program, it defies reason that DHS has chosen to discontinue funding for the *Well Fed Means Less Lead* program in FY 2018.

The time for action from the state is now—the health of Milwaukee's children and their families is critically important to the future success of our state, and we must not stand idle or let minor disagreements prevent available federal dollars from reaching families that suffer from one or more of their household members being poisoned by toxic lead.

We look forward to your swift response.

Sincerely,

Senator LaTonya Johnson
6th Senate District

Senator Chris Larson
7th Senate District

Rep. David Crowley
17th Assembly District

Senator Tim Carpenter
3rd Senate District

Rep. Evan Goyke
18th Assembly District

Rep. Jason Fields
11th Assembly District

Rep. Josh Zepnick
9th Assembly District

Rep. Jonathan Brostoff
19th Assembly District

Rep. Daniel Riemer
7th Assembly District

Rep. Christine Sinicki
20th Assembly District