

**Written Testimony of Meleah Geertsma, Director of Water Infrastructure,
Alliance for the Great Lakes**

**Submitted to the Development Committee, Ohio House of Representatives
Hearing on the Lead Line Replacement Act, House Bill 307
(submission date September 30, 2025)**

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Lorenz, Ranking Member Abdullahi, and esteemed members of the House Development Committee, my name is Meleah Geertsma and I am submitting written testimony in support of House Bill 307, the Lead Line Replacement Act, on behalf of the Alliance for the Great Lakes, where I direct the Water Infrastructure Team. I hold a bachelor's degree in public health, as well as a law degree and a master's of public health. I also bring over two decades of public health, legal and policy experience to the Alliance, including working on lead in drinking water issues at the local, state, and federal levels for nearly a decade. The Alliance, in turn, is a regional organization committed to protecting the health of the Great Lakes and the people and communities that depend on them.

One of the greatest threats to the health of our region's people from water is the legacy of lead that runs through our Great Lakes communities. This harmful history continues to negatively impact the health of children and adults today, limiting their potential and putting a drain on our economy. Now is the time for Ohio to do its part to address this legacy once and for all, along with other Great Lakes states like Michigan and Illinois that have stepped up to get the lead out.

From the outset of my work to understand lead in drinking water, I dug deep into the science and data behind the issue, learning how short we'd fallen as a country and region in adequately identifying, testing for, and controlling or removing lead, despite significant efforts. From my public health training, I already knew that there is no "safe" level of lead exposure – meaning that there are harms to health documented by the scientific research at all levels of exposure.¹ The impacts include not only profound harms to developing fetuses and young children at even low levels of exposure, but also threats to adults' cardiac, neurological and reproductive health, such as behavioral problems, hypertension, reduced fertility, and miscarriages.²

I learned that lead service lines are still ubiquitous in homes and neighborhoods across our Great Lakes region, and that in many cases, systems did not have a complete picture of how many of their service lines are still made of lead and where those lines are located. In Ohio, important recent work on mapping and reporting lead lines has shed new light on this widespread problem.³ I also learned that lead levels in residential drinking water can vary widely from sample to

¹ See Cleveland Clinic, "Lead Poisoning," available at <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/11312-lead-poisoning>.

² See *id.*; see also Ohio State University, "Lead Safety Fact Sheet," available at <https://ehs.osu.edu/kb/lead-safety-fact-sheet>.

³ See Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, "Lead Lines Mapping," available at <https://epa.ohio.gov/divisions-and-offices/drinking-and-ground-waters/reports-and-data/lead-lines-mapping>

sample and day to day and house to house even within the same water system, and that lead service lines are consistently the greatest source of lead in household drinking water – an understanding advanced in labs based in Ohio by scientists and engineers trained at Ohio universities.⁴ And I learned that on the whole, Great Lakes water systems have hovered just below the older, inadequate federal action level under the Safe Drinking Water Act, meaning that they have significant amounts of harmful lead in their water even today.⁵

I also learned that in too many places throughout our Great Lakes region, the burden of understanding the threats posed by lead in drinking water and addressing those threats falls on families and individuals. But not everyone has the resources or the information to understand let alone mitigate this threat. Nor should people have to rely solely on their own resources to protect themselves and their families against a public health emergency that arises from water infrastructure – a core public service – or worry that their children will be poisoned when visiting a friend’s or family member’s home. And water systems should not have to go it alone, but need the full support of the state to address this ongoing challenge.

With this important bill and the leadership of Representatives Jarrells and Blasdel, Ohio has the opportunity to step up now and ensure that the legacy of lead that is still with us does not continue to harm current and future generations. I invite you to join them, and thank you for your time and attention to this important infrastructure and public health matter, as well as the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 307.

Respectfully submitted,

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⁴ See, e.g., Lytle, et. al. (2019), “Sequential drinking water sampling as a tool for evaluating lead in Flint, Michigan,” available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0043135419302647>.

⁵ See, e.g., Washington University McKelvey School of Engineering, “New lead testing method could reveal higher levels in water,” available at <https://engineering.washu.edu/news/2021/New-lead-testing-method-could-reveal-higher-levels-in-water.html>.