

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 11, 2023

The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel
Chairwoman
U.S. Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairwoman Rosenworcel,

We write regarding recent reports of lead-sheathed telephone cables found underground, underwater, and at the surface level across the nation. On July 9, The Wall Street Journal released an investigative report (report) that uncovered a “hidden source of [lead] contamination” in the form of more than 2,000 lead covered cables. Dr. Jack Caravanos, a New York University environmental public-health professor who assisted with the research, told reporters that “A new, uncontrolled source of lead like old telephone cables may partly explain why children continue to have lead in their blood...”¹ We urge the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to expeditiously identify authorities under the *Communications Act of 1934*, including the FCC’s responsibility for “promoting safety of life and property,” to compel responsible parties to share information, such as past sampling and mapping of lead-sheathed cables. We also encourage the FCC to work with other relevant agencies to investigate whether these cables have negative impacts on the health and safety of our constituents and our environment, and if deemed necessary, work toward plans for required remediation.

In Illinois, the persistent presence of lead is a public health disaster that has plagued our communities for decades. According to samples collected from our state’s 1,768 water utilities, more than eight of every ten Illinoisans lives in a community where the toxic metal was found in the tap water.² No amount of lead exposure is safe for children’s physical and mental development.³ Lead exposure can lead to severe developmental delays, weight loss, learning difficulties, and a slew of other health complications. Every zip code within the city of Chicago is considered high risk for lead exposure by the Illinois Department of Public Health, which thus recommends that all children be tested for lead poisoning at one, two, and three years of age.⁴ The discovery of these lead cables as another potential source of lead exposure may help explain the persistently high rates throughout our state.

Despite the decades of science on the harms and the on-going threat of lead, telecommunications firms and others that own these potentially toxic cables have not yet disclosed in full the use and location of these cables, the materials used for their construction, the level of lead that the sites contain, or the status of their removal and contamination remediation. We fully expect the telecommunications companies to be cooperative with the FCC and other

¹ The Wall Street Journal, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/lead-cables-telecoms-att-toxic-5b34408b>, 2023

² The Chicago Tribune, [Lead found in tap water in towns across Illinois \(chicagotribune.com\)](https://www.chicagotribune.com), 2021

³ NPR, [CDC announces stringent new standards for lead poisoning in children : NPR](https://www.npr.com), 2022


⁴ Illinois Department of Public Health <https://dph.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/idph/files/forms/childleadevaluationtestingrecommendations.pdf>, 2022

relevant agencies to ascertain the exact locations of these cables and provide any other helpful information on this issue. As the FCC undertakes this investigation, we ask to be kept updated on these efforts. Additionally, we ask the FCC to provide responses to our following inquiries within 30 days of receiving this letter:

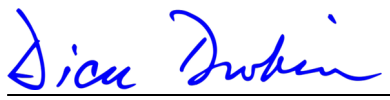
1. Does the FCC possess records of all lead-sheathed telephone cables and their owners, along with the details regarding the status of their use, the materials used, location, and any records of repair, removal, or contamination remediation? If the FCC does possess those records, please share them with us within 30 days of receiving this letter. .
2. If the FCC does not yet possess those records, what administrative steps are you taking to ensure that you receive that data in full? Is legislation needed to grant this authority?
3. Does the FCC have the authority to require remediation and implement the appropriate mitigation and abatement measures, if determined necessary?
4. Has the FCC established a plan to work with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), and any other agency of jurisdiction to ensure that the agencies are collecting relevant and timely information on the location and ownership of lead cables? If a plan is in place, please share details of the plan. If a plan is not in place, when will such a plan developed by the FCC, EPA, CEQ, and any other agencies be available?

We are dedicated to working with the FCC, the Biden Administration, states, and our constituents to eliminate all points of lead exposure. Thank you for your attention to this urgent public health issue, and we look forward to your response.


Sincerely,



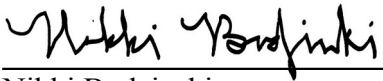
Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



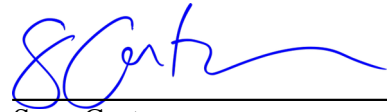
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Nikki Budzinski
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress



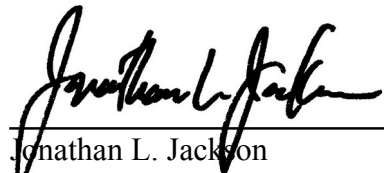
Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



Bill Foster
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress



Eric Sorensen
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress