

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 11, 2023

The Honorable Robin Carnahan  
Administrator  
U.S. General Services Administration  
1800 F Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20405

Dear Administrator Carnahan,

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 published an investigative 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...”<sup>1</sup> We are writing to inquire if the General Services Administration (GSA) owns or leases any lead-sheathed telecommunication cables, as well as any land that may contain lead-sheathed cables.

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 community where the toxic metal was found in the tap water.<sup>2</sup> No amount of lead exposure is safe for children’s physical and mental development.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> The discovery of these lead cables as another potential source of lead exposure may help explain the persistently high rates throughout our state.

We ask GSA to provide responses to our following inquiries within 30 days of receiving this letter:

1. Does GSA know of any federally owned or leased lead-sheathed telecommunication cables, as well as any land or property that may contain lead-sheathed cables?
2. Does GSA plan to begin a full investigation into whether such properties or cables exist in their portfolio? Does GSA have the ability to conduct such an investigation?

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


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


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


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

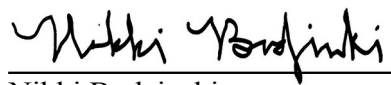
We appreciate the administration's attention to this urgent public health issue. We are dedicated to working with the GSA, the Biden Administration, states, and our constituents to eliminate all points of lead exposure.

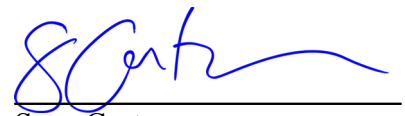
Sincerely,

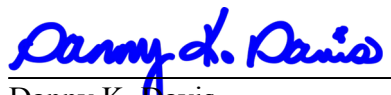
  
Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Member of Congress

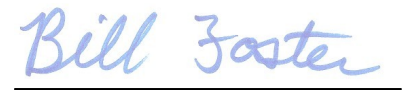
  
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

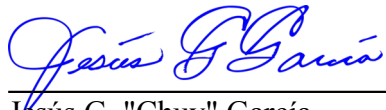
  
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

  
Nikki Budzinski  
Member of Congress

  
Sean Casten  
Member of Congress

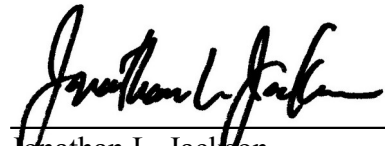
  
Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress

  
Bill Foster  
Member of Congress



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Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
Member of Congress



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Jonathan L. Jackson  
Member of Congress



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Delia C. Ramirez  
Member of Congress



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Eric Sorensen  
Member of Congress



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Mike Quigley  
Member of Congress