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Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the three million members of the National Education Association (NEA), the United Teachers of Flint (UTF), and the students they serve, we urge you to swiftly act to ensure that the people of Flint, Michigan have clean water distributed to their community and help rectify the damage already inflicted. Children and their families in Flint are victims of a *preventable* crisis that has been perpetrated against a community because government officials were more concerned with saving dollars than protecting public health and safety. We urge that you protect the most vulnerable among us, young children, by ensuring near-, mid- and long-term needs are met to address the health, emotional, and social issues caused by the Flint water crisis.

In the immediate near-term, students in Flint need nurses, counselors, and special education supports – along with the requisite professional development for UTF educators – in every school to ensure they have access to the supports and services necessary to assess and help treat the health and cognitive effects of the water contamination. Efforts also need to be made to help identify which students have been exposed to lead poisoning that have yet to be diagnosed. These and other solutions should be coupled with strategies to mitigate and treat the lasting effects Flint’s water contamination will have on students and families for years to come.

However, nurses and special education supports cannot solve the problem alone, as risk of exposure to lead and contaminated water needs to be eliminated immediately. Free home inspections and water testing are urgently needed for all impacted Flint residents to begin to identify the full scope of the crisis. Access to fresh fruits and vegetables is crucial for all residents – the Environmental Protection Agency [reports](#) that a nutritious diet is vital to protecting people from lead poisoning. Further, water filters and bottled water are not enough; Flint must have a new, state-of-the-art infrastructure water distribution system including replacing damaged pipes that lead from city streets into residents’ homes. The Michigan Congressional delegation is taking steps to address the litany of issues this crisis has created and we urge you to join NEA and UTF in supporting their efforts. Whether attached to the *Energy Policy Modernization Act* or any other applicable legislation, we urge you to pass the *Compromise Emergency Relief Amendment to Address Flint Water Crisis*, introduced by Senators Stabenow (D-MI) and Peters (D-MI), which includes infrastructure financing and funding relief for states and cities, in particular Flint.

In addition to medical care and a healthy diet, [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) research shows](#) that early childhood education is essential to address learning and behavioral issues in children who have suffered from lead poisoning. The CDC reports that effects are irreversible and continue into adulthood including lower-IQ, learning problems, slowed growth and an inability to pay attention in school. NEA and UTF support Senator Peters’ bill, the *Children’s Head Start Intervention for Life and Development (CHILD) Act* (S. 2491), a one-time grant to expand Head Start and Early Head Start access thereby providing the early childhood education Flint students need in the aftermath of this tragedy. This bill also authorizes funds for the training and technical assistance early education program staff will require to address students’ behavioral and developmental needs. NEA and UTF also support a similar bill introduced in the House by Rep. Kildee (D-MI), H.R. 4479, which is a comprehensive bill that would,

among other things, expand access to Head Start and Early Head Start, increase funding for special education services, establish school-based health centers, and provide other wraparound services for students and families in Flint.

The impacts of the Flint water crisis will not end when the story falls from national headlines. A long-term view is necessary to serve the needs of students throughout their K-12 careers. We encourage Congress to plan and take appropriate and effective steps to help address the impacts this crisis will have from now until students complete their secondary education. This means connecting students with health and community services, ensuring all schools have special education supports, counseling, and other wraparound services. Taking the long view also means meeting the federal promise to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), especially because the state and local community will not be able to meet the funding shortfall on the horizon and the students of Flint will be in serious need of the education and support services IDEA provides.

The Flint tragedy reflects a pernicious national trend of institutional and environmental racism wherein a disproportionate number of people of color and those in poverty are exposed to polluted air, water, and soil. Your race, household income, or Zip code you live in should not determine your access to clean water or fresh, unpolluted air to breathe. Yet, [African Americans are 75% more likely](#) to live in an area with potential exposure to hazardous chemicals and children living below the poverty line are at a [greater risk for lead poisoning](#). Fifty-six percent of Flint residents are African American and more than 40% live below the federal poverty line, [according to the U.S. Census Bureau](#). This tragedy is a sobering reminder of the prevalence of institutional racism and resegregation in the United States – we see it in the effect of housing policy on [education](#) and [health](#), and it is unfolding before our very eyes in Flint.

Finally, the people of Flint deserve answers and they deserve accountability from the government officials responsible for this crisis. Clean water is a right, not a privilege. Our students, families, and UTF members in Flint are owed the peace of mind that the water in their homes and schools is not exposing them to potentially devastating health problems. We urge Congress to take action by investigating and reviewing this crisis to be sure those responsible are held accountable for their neglect for the health and safety of the children and families of Flint, Michigan.

Sincerely,



Lily Eskelsen Garcia  
NEA President



Karen Christian  
UTF President