

**House Committee on Science, Space and Technology**  
**Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight**  
**Testimony by Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.**  
**Tuesday, October 15, 2019**

Congresswoman Sherrill, thank you for holding this subcommittee meeting in Bloomfield, Essex County. The presence of lead in our drinking water causes us all great concern and creates a public health emergency.

The public was first alerted to high levels of lead in the drinking water in Newark in 2017. Since then, the city has been chemically treating the water to help re-coat services lines, passed out bottled water and distributed filters. All of these initiatives address the immediate issue of providing clean drinking water to our residents. However, in the many discussions in which I have participated, the only permanent solution is to replace lead service lines with copper pipes.

Although Essex County does not maintain a municipal water system, I recognized that this is a public health concern and drastic measures needed to be taken. Newark had started a program to replace the 18,000 service lines, but it would have taken Newark at least a decade to complete the task given the fiscal restraints of the City. This includes digging up the old lines and replacing the lead piping with copper piping.

In order to speed up the process, I realized that Newark needed a quick infusion of cash, which would allow the city to hire more contractors and get the work done more quickly, reducing the amount of time to 24 to 30 months. Because of the Aaa bond rating we received in 2017, Essex County and our Improvement Authority were in a good position to help. With the Aaa rating, the highest rating available which indicates financial strength, we were able to bond \$120 million and loan that to Newark at a low interest rate. Newark is then repaying the bond over a 30-year period and is not charging property owners to have the pipe replacement done.

We have extended the same program to Bloomfield, Nutley and Belleville, which purchase water from the City of Newark. As of today, we know our municipal partners in those three communities are still doing their due diligence to determine if this program is feasible for them.

But let's be honest. Replacing lead service lines can and probably will affect all of our communities throughout the County, State and County sooner or later. Homes built before the 1950s probably were constructed with lead service lines. How long will chemical treatments be effective in coating the interior of service lines so the lead doesn't leach into the supply?

Again, the only real solution is to replace lead service lines, which can be expensive for any property owner. Are there more modern, advanced alternatives that may be more affordable and less disruptive? Currently, property owners are inconvenienced when the road in front of their property and front yard are dug up.

No matter how the pipes are replaced, cost will always be the biggest concern. In Essex County, we stepped up to the plate and backed the investment with a \$120 million loan. Senator Cory Booker sponsored legislation that makes \$100 million available to Newark and other municipalities replace lead service lines.

So while this subcommittee investigates ways to streamline the lead service line replacement, we also ask that you consider how much it will cost our municipalities and property owners.