



Great Public Schools  
for Every Student

1201 16th Street, NW | Washington, DC 20036 | Phone: 202-833-4000

Lily Eskelsen García  
*President*

Rebecca S. Pringle  
*Vice President*

Princess R. Moss  
*Secretary-Treasurer*

Kim A. Anderson  
*Executive Director*

September 24, 2019

The Honorable Harley Rouda  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Oversight and Reform  
Subcommittee on the Environment  
2300 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-0548

The Honorable Rashida Tlaib  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Oversight and Reform  
Subcommittee on the Environment  
1628 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-2213

Dear Representatives Rouda and Tlaib:

On behalf of our three million members and the 50 million students they serve, we would like to submit the following comments in connection with the September 16 hearing, “Environmental Injustice: Exploring Inequities in Air and Water Quality in Michigan.”

Government officials more concerned with saving dollars than protecting public health caused the water crisis in Flint, Michigan. In 2014, the city decided to stop buying water from Detroit and instead get it from the Flint River—a graveyard for abandoned appliances and auto parts. The city figured to save about \$8.5 million. Soon after, Flint residents noticed changes in their water. Researchers determined that the percentage of Flint children with lead poisoning doubled after Flint switched to the river, and even tripled in some neighborhoods. In some homes, the drinking actually water met the definition of toxic waste.

Exposure to such high levels of lead can cause lifelong problems. “No safe blood lead level in children has been identified. Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to affect IQ, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement. And effects of lead exposure cannot be corrected,” according to the [Centers on Disease Control and Prevention](#).

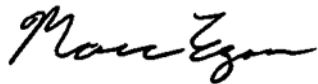
The Flint water crisis is a sobering reminder that a disproportionate number of people of color and people living in poverty are exposed to air and water pollution. Fifty-four percent of Flint residents are African American and 40 percent live below the federal poverty line, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).

The experience in Flint underscores what University of Michigan experts on environmental justice determined nearly a decade ago. Most students of color attend schools in the most polluted parts of the state: 82 percent of African American students and 62 percent of Hispanic students, compared to 44 percent of white students. “Furthermore, schools located in areas with the highest pollution levels also had the lowest attendance rates (a potential indicator of poor health) and the highest proportions of students failing to meet the state’s educational testing standards.” (Health Affairs, [“Air Pollution Around Schools Is Linked To Poorer Student Health And Academic Performance.”](#) May 2011)

Recent policy shifts threaten to exacerbate these deeply disturbing findings. The Trump administration is rolling back tailpipe emission standards despite widespread opposition, including from the automobile industry that plays such a vital role in Michigan’s economy and way of life. Clean water protections are being rolled back as well, allowing once-banned pollutants to proliferate near rivers, streams, and other bodies of water.

We thank the committee for the opportunity to submit these comments and stand ready to support action to ensure a healthy environment for all our students. Clean water to drink and clean air to breathe is a right, not a privilege.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Egan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marc Egan  
Director of Government Relations  
National Education Association