



**Written Testimony
House Committee on Energy and
Commerce, Subcommittee on Health**

Flint, Michigan: A Coordinated Response

Statement of

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Chairman Upton, Ranking Member Pallone, Chairman Pitts, Ranking Member Green, Chairman Shimkus, Ranking Member Tonko and distinguished Members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, I am Dr. Nicole Lurie and I am the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning about the situation in Flint, Michigan and the federal government's response. On Saturday, January 16, 2016, the President signed an emergency declaration ordering federal assistance in support of state and local response efforts to address high levels of lead in the Flint, Michigan water supply. The President also named the Department of Health and Human Services as the Lead Federal Agency. I was asked to assume the responsibility as the Lead Federal Official to lead federal response efforts in support of the State of Michigan and local governments. In addition, I serve as the principal advisor to the HHS Secretary on all matters related to federal health and medical preparedness in response to public health emergencies and direct a group of programs to respond to medical and public health emergencies.

ASPR is uniquely qualified to respond in Flint. As authorized by the 2006 Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act (PAHPA) and reauthorized in 2013, ASPR works within HHS and with its federal, state, tribal, and local partners to advance the public health preparedness of our nation by helping build communities that are more resilient to disaster. ASPR's responsibilities are broad, and include overseeing advanced research, development, and procurement of medical countermeasures; collaborating with health care systems across the country to improve preparedness; leading federal public health and medical response efforts under Emergency

Support Function #8 of the National Response Framework; and providing integrated policy and strategic direction under the National Health Security Strategy. Coordination has been a central focus of my tenure as the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. We have facilitated coordination opportunities among state and local health systems through Hospital Preparedness Program (HPP) grants and Health Care Coalitions (HCC), strengthened our day-to-day systems to aid in responding when disaster strikes, furthered medical countermeasure development through the Public Health Emergency Medical Countermeasures Enterprise, and advanced science-based policy decision-making processes before, during, and after emergencies. Our all-hazards approach to public health and medical emergencies allows us to be flexible in responding to both known and unanticipated threats.

Over the past nine years, ASPR has built a comprehensive range of capabilities that allow us to operate efficiently and to simultaneously manage multiple response efforts. Our government has learned many lessons from previous response efforts and we are making progress in Flint. After initial discussions with the inter-agency, I accepted a simultaneous role as the leader of the whole-of-government response and as the lead coordinator within HHS, since this is largely a public health event. As an immediate first step, we set up a Unified Command Group (UCG) in Flint with all the involved federal agencies and convened the Disaster Leadership Group (DLG) in Washington to assess the situation and begin to align available resources and response capabilities to support the community. While the State maintains responsibility for the response, since the beginning of this crisis we have engaged with both the State and City of Flint leadership to understand and address their needs, including for direct federal support, guidance and technical assistance. The overall federal strategy involves four core elements: ensuring

access to safe water, fixing the water supply, assessing the size and scope of the problem, and mitigating the health effects of lead. I am pleased to report that we have made strong progress on the targets for these goals, primarily through enhanced services for the community.

Since my appointment as the Lead Federal Official for the response, I have traveled to Flint nearly every week to engage with: community leaders; government officials such as the Mayor of Flint, the Governor of Michigan, state senators, and Members of Congress; health care leaders; civic and faith-based organizations; business leaders; technical experts; and most importantly, the citizens of Flint. Residents are worried, confused, and angry about the situation; they want a solution to the water crisis and they are concerned about their health and the health of their children. While many adverse health effects of lead exposure can be addressed with proper interventions, the psychological impact of the water supply problems on the community may be longer lasting. Recognizing the broad impact of this crisis, the federal government is committed to supporting physical and behavioral health, educational, nutritional and other services to support the Flint community.

To support a broad and coordinated response, I identified and mobilized a team of federal partners from across the government to work together in Flint. Staff from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Small Business Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Education (ED), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) joined staff from my office, ASPR, and other HHS divisions including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Agency for Toxic Substances and

Disease Registry, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, as well as the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.

To assist the state in providing immediate access to safe water, President Obama issued an Emergency Declaration under the Stafford Act on January 16, 2016 authorizing emergency protective measures to provide water, water filters, water filter cartridges, water test kits, and other necessary related items for a period of 90 days. To date 5.3 million liters of bottled water has been provided by FEMA to the State of Michigan. On March 25, FEMA approved the State of Michigan's request and extended this commodities mission to support Flint until August 14, 2016. Through FEMA procurements, non-government donations, and the dedicated state and local personnel who distribute the water, filters, and cartridges, 99.9 percent of households have been engaged in the response efforts and 89.8% of official addresses have had filters delivered.

The federal response is also focused on restoring the safety of Flint's water system. EPA and other federal agencies are working with state and local officials to monitor the status of Flint's system, using sound science to move towards long-term system recovery.

Over the course of our response, some residents raised concerns about skin rashes that they attributed to showering. An Assessment of Chemical Exposure team from the CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry at CDC is currently exploring possible explanations regarding whether for these skin concerns may be related to the water supply.

Our biggest health concern involves children under the age of six because they are most susceptible to lead exposure and long-term health problems. We know that there is a lot we can do to help mitigate the effects on children who have been exposed to lead, especially to encourage their achievement of developmental milestones. We are working with HHS grantees in Genesee County to improve access to early childhood education and primary care services through Head Start and the Health Centers Program and to expand and enhance the Medicaid program for children up to age 21 and pregnant women in Flint potentially exposed to lead. We acted quickly to approve a Medicaid expansion in Flint to ensure health care coverage and expanded services. Approximately 15,000 additional children and pregnant women are now eligible for Medicaid coverage, and 30,000 current Medicaid beneficiaries in the area are eligible for expanded services. We provided \$500,000 in additional HHS funding to help two Flint Health Centers provide health care and outreach services to families in Flint.

The EPA is gathering data to estimate the number of people who may have been exposed to lead through the Flint water system. It has presented recommendations for lead testing and long-term monitoring for children to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. HUD is working with the Flint Housing Commission and a local health care provider to schedule onsite blood lead testing for children in public housing. CDC staff and commissioned officers from the U.S. Public Health Service have provided staff expertise to the Genesee County Health Department to process blood lead level tests and to follow up with children who have elevated lead levels so they can receive additional education and nutritional services, connect to a medical facility, and have their homes checked for other sources of lead.

Early education programs are critical tools in helping children overcome the potential effects of lead exposure. The Department of Education (ED) has actively worked with state and local education leaders and affected families to support response efforts in Flint, and expects to maintain a long-term relationship with stakeholders in Michigan, Genesee County, and Flint. ED has provided technical assistance about estimating long-term educational costs and about using federal funds to address immediate and long-term early intervention and special education needs of infants and toddlers and their families, and school age children—in areas ranging from early evaluation to effective early intervention and special education practices to engaging parents. It has disseminated vital information and facilitated dialogue between federal, State, and local education and health officials about the impact of lead poisoning on educational outcomes. And ED's Readiness in Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center provided training in Flint on Resilience Strategies for Educators at the Genesee County Community Action Resource Department Head Start office.

Further, to help understand how the learning environment had been disrupted by the water crisis, ED staff made two site visits to Flint and met with representatives from the Flint Community Schools, the Genesee Intermediate School District, and the Michigan Department of Education as well as representatives from Michigan's Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) funded under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. ED is currently working with both school districts on a package of financial assistance to help restore the learning environment, and with the PTI on additional funding to inform families whose children may be eligible for early intervention and special education services.

HHS is providing \$3.6 million in additional one-time funding to allow Flint's existing Head Start and Early Head Start programs to provide enhanced and expanded services, including additional

classrooms, home visiting support, and transportation for medical appointments. These programs play an important role in providing comprehensive early learning, health, and family well-being services to 1,011 Head Start children and 166 Early Head Start children in the city of Flint.

Recognizing the importance of nutrition in mitigating the negative health effects of lead absorption, USDA is assisting the state in increasing the community's access to target foods high in Vitamin C, calcium, and iron. Many vendors at the Flint Farmers Market are authorized to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, which can be used for the purchase of target foods.

To help school-aged children specifically, USDA approved the Michigan Department of Education's request for an additional \$62,700 through the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, which provides fresh fruit and vegetable snacks at no cost to students in eligible schools. USDA encouraged eligible high-poverty schools in the area to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision, a program that ensures access to healthy school meals for all students at no charge. USDA also waived requirements that schools provide potable water to students during meal service, but Flint schools continue to provide bottled water to students. Finally, USDA awarded a Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) for Children grant to Flint, Michigan. Summer EBT provides additional food benefits to low-income families with school age children during the summer when school meals are not available. Implementing Summer EBT in Flint is another strategy for maximizing the impact of FNS's broad range of resources, educational efforts, and programs that can help mitigate the negative health effects of the dangerous levels of lead in the

city's water supply. Through Summer EBT, Flint students from low income households will continue to have consistent access to the types of nutritious food they eat in school, which may help mitigate the effects of lead, throughout the summer months.

Finally, for younger children and their mothers, USDA is also temporarily allowing the State of Michigan to use Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) funds to conduct lead testing for WIC participants. This action could lead to 3,800 WIC participants being tested for lead. WIC is also allowing participants to use WIC [benefits](#) for ready-to-feed infant formula, which does not need to be mixed with water, and participants can also swap powdered formula for ready-to-feed formula. USDA also waived certain requirements and thereby allowed schools to provide bottled water to students.

We also are supporting the behavioral and mental health needs of affected communities. Early in the response, I deployed PHS Commissioned Corps officers to assist with the behavioral health response. Some officers offered psychological first aid training for interested community members, as well as train-the-trainer and stress management sessions for health and mental health providers and caregivers. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has a Disaster Distress Hotline available for crisis counseling and is supporting children and families of Flint through emergency response grants. Finally, the CDC is using their Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response technique to identify those in need of primary care and behavioral health services.

Beyond the critical need to support individual health, responders also need to support the city's health with an eye toward recovery and resilience. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Economic Development Administration, and the Small Business Administration are working closely with the City of Flint on economic development and interagency coordination. HUD extended the Strong Cities, Strong Communities program in Flint to provide a continued resource for economic development. HUD obtained confirmation from the Flint Housing Commission that it has provided water filters to every unit of public housing and to all Housing Choice Voucher assisted households. The Flint Housing Commission confirmed 100 percent installation of filters to all public housing, while HUD has done the same for HUD's federally assisted and owned properties, and HUD-insured properties. HUD is continuing to work with the Flint Housing Commission and multifamily property owners to ensure upkeep of this equipment. In addition, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) is helping buyers secure home loans by expanding qualification for FHA-insured mortgages. FHA typically requires lenders to ensure that properties meet certain minimum standards of livability, including potable water. Properties in Flint may still qualify for an FHA-insured mortgage if the individual water purification system meets all federal, state and local standards. The Small Business Administration (SBA) is helping Flint businesses recover from the water crisis. SBA approved Michigan State's request for low-interest disaster loans to assist businesses owners who have been affected by lead contamination. It provided approximately \$400,000 in additional funding through a number of programs and is offering low-interest disaster loans for small businesses within the greater Flint area. The SBA has also opened a Business Recovery Center in Flint to administer the loans.

Beyond the programmatic assets that the federal government has supported in Flint, we have also prioritized the immediate needs of county and City in response to this complex event. This support includes deploying an assistant surgeon general to Flint at the mayor's request to advise her on health issues facing the city. This experienced U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps officer, a rear admiral and assistant surgeon general, is helping identify immediate, mid-, and long-term health goals for a community recovery plan, and working with the mayor to develop a position for a permanent public health advisor. Michigan State University (MSU) is providing an educational response to the situation in Flint, MI. MSU translated and developed Spanish, Arabic, and Chinese versions of the 'Fight Lead with Nutrition' fact sheet. Moreover, the MSU Cooperative Extension has provided research based on how to eat healthy to prevent lead poisoning, including a diet with higher calcium, iron, and vitamin C. We are also engaging the federal and academic research communities through the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, a component of the National Institutes of Health, to study the health impact of lead exposure and inform the public health response in the Flint community over the long term.

Our efforts in Flint have been made possible by close, person-to-person coordination with federal, state, and local partners under the UCG. The UCG provides operational direction and technical expertise through the federal employees working in Flint.

The federal government is truly providing a whole-of-government response including substantial resources to Flint. We anticipate that these efforts will serve as a foundation for meeting long-term needs as the community recovers. We are committed to giving the residents of Flint access to clean and safe water and will continue to be involved in Flint's recovery to address the

wellbeing of the residents, especially its children. This is a long-term effort, and the federal government will be supporting every step of the way. Again, thank you and I look forward to your questions.