



Los Angeles Office
205 S. Broadway, Suite 205
Los Angeles, CA 90012

The Honorable Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell
Chair, Committee on Education
State Capitol, Room 159
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: Assembly Bill 885 (Rubio) – School Drinking Water – SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember O'Donnell,

California Food Policy Advocates is writing to express our support for AB 885. The Flint water crisis shocked the country and raised serious concerns about the protection of children from lead and other contaminants in drinking water. AB 885 would help ensure that all children in California have safe, lead-free water to drink at school.

CPFA is a statewide, policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food. We envision a healthy and food-secure California where all Californians have the physical, social and economic access to the foods necessary for a nutritious diet including access to healthy beverages, like water.

Water fountains at schools are a known source of lead exposure for kids. Our analysis of drinking water data shows that severe water quality violations have occurred in California over the last decade ([See: CFPA Water Quality Dashboard](#)). While water safety data exist, it mostly focuses on violations in the water system – it does not adequately capture problems that might emerge on a school campus. Contamination (e.g. lead) can occur in school pipes and faucets and not from the system itself.

A 2016 study found that as many as 1,048,222 students attended schools impacted by water systems that did not meet primary safe drinking water standards during the period from 2003-2014. While the problem exists statewide, the Central Valley had both the greatest number and highest percentage of schools in the region impacted by unsafe drinking water. Furthermore, schools affected by unsafe drinking water had higher percentages of Hispanic and Latino students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.¹

What We Know About Water in Schools

- **Significant concerns about the quality and safety of water in schools persist.** Unsafe drinking water impacted one in four schools in the Central Valley and one in three schools in the Tulare Lake region.² This correlates to other disparities as many of the students in these same schools also suffer from some of the worst air quality in the country and other environmental health hazards.
- **There is keen interest in policy action to expand access to free, safe water in schools.** This was a high priority for advocates and stakeholders we convened as water access in schools was seen as critical to the health and academic success of students.
- **Testing must be combined with support for amelioration.** New State Water Board Policy requires water systems to provide schools with free site testing. There was broad agreement among stakeholders that testing alone is not enough – we must make

¹ Are we Providing Our Kids Safe Drinking Water? An Analysis of California Schools Impacted by Unsafe Drinking Water. Community Water Center and Environmental Justice Coalition. 2016

² Ibid

investments and take action to address the results of the tests when they compromise children's health.

AB 885 would help prevent lead exposures by requiring early public education and K-12 schools to install and maintain filters certified to remove lead on taps used for drinking or cooking. Also, the bill requires schools to develop and adopt a plan for replacing any lead-bearing parts in their water delivery systems. Finally, the bill requires periodic water testing at every public school in California.

For this reason, CFPA supports AB 885 and urge the committee to support the bill. Let's ensure that every child in California has safe, lead-free water to drink at school.

Sincerely,

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

Hector Gutierrez
Nutrition Policy Advocate
California Food Policy Advocates

CC: The Honorable Blanca E. Rubio, California State Assembly (Author)
Members of the Assembly Education Committee