

# 'Lead is all we're thinking about': Group demands Anne Arundel school board ramp up testing

By **LAUREN LUMPKIN**

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The Rev. Randy Callender delivers a testimony on behalf of Anne Arundel Connecting Together. More than 100 protestors attended the Board of Education meeting Wednesday night.



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A group of parents and community members is asking the Anne Arundel County Board of Education to finish testing water outlets for lead by Dec. 31 — seven months ahead of schedule.

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Anne Arundel Connecting Together, or ACT, came to Wednesday night's board meeting with a list of demands. They want school board members to respond by Nov. 7.

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"When our children are leaving their gym classes and they are thirsty for a cool drink of water from the water fountains — lead. When the cafeteria staff boils pasta — lead. When a parent fills a water cooler for an outside activity event using the spigot outside — lead," said the Rev. Randy Callender, a member of ACT.

"Until those schools are tested otherwise, lead is all we're thinking about."

The faith- and community-based group also asked the district to shut off consumable water outlets at schools that have not been tested yet or are awaiting results and at schools built before 1988

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and have not replaced drinking water outlets by Nov. 7.

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Protesters called for the county to re-order the testing schedule to prioritize elementary schools built before 1988, in accordance with state law.

About 115 people representing ACT wielded bright yellow signs with the word "ACT" in big red letters at the meeting. Members delivered emotional testimonies.



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"We just ended a segment in science class for lead poisoning," said Jayden Hill, a student at Annapolis Middle School. "I found out that lead can cause you to not focus and, if people drink that in school, they won't be able to focus in class. I thought that was the point of school: to

learn and to be successful in your life."

Jayden's father, Jonathan, shared concerns about anemia, irritability and reproductive health — all

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issues that can be tied to exposure to high levels of lead, according to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. He has eight children, all of which have attended county public schools.

Anne Arundel County Public Schools has been confronting its lead problem since March, but teachers, parents and students remain unsatisfied with the district's progress.

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"We are, as you know, aggressively testing for the lead. We will continue to do that," said schools Superintendent George Arlotto.

Arlotto also said the district is in the process of hiring a second testing company to help with the workload.

Board President Julie Hummer called for collaboration with the community and county to test water outlets for lead in homes, libraries and other facilities that kids frequent.

"We're doing the testing in schools as rapidly as we can. Our kids are in other places, so let's work together," Hummer said.

The protesters also criticized the school district for failing to provide "safe water" as schools undergo

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Michael O'Donnell, a music teacher at North County High School, feels that pressure. He created a [GoFundMe](#) to raise \$5,000 for water bottles, water coolers stations and a refillable bottle station.

"These kids still come to school, they still drink water. What are we we doing to make sure they water the consume is clean" O'Donnell said. "It's not even my job to be worrying about this, but maybe I have an opportunity to keep the conversation going. We're all affected by it so we're all responsible for being part of the solution."

O'Donnell's campaign has raised \$430 as of Wednesday night.

At least 19 Anne Arundel County public schools have unacceptably high levels of lead in their water, according to results from the first tests conducted under a new state law.



North County is one of 45 schools that have undergone water testing and received results. That's a little more than one-third of the schools in the district.

Results showed 12 outlets at North County had elevated levels of lead, or more than 20 parts per billion, according to Environmental Protection Agency standards. Only two of the elevated outlets at the high school were used for drinking before they were shut off.

O'Donnell expressed concern about student athletes who used sink water to fill their water bottles before practice and games. He said the sink students used tested below the 20 ppb threshold and has since been marked with a sign that discourages people from using it.

"Even if the amount of lead is small, (students) still shouldn't be drinking it," he said.

Still, it's difficult to track where exactly students get their water at school.

"You would think that there's no reason to be concerned because they're sinks where people are just washing their hands. In a school of 2,400 kids, you don't know where kids are filling their bottles

up."

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Lauren Lumpkin is formerly a reporter for the Capital Gazette. She joined the staff in 2018 after interning at The Baltimore Sun. Lauren moved to Baltimore from Washington, D.C. after graduating from American University. Her work has appeared in The Nation, The Washington Post and NBC Washington. Lauren is originally from Cleveland, Ohio.

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