



## Alliance to Prevent Legionnaires' Disease

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### Testimony for Assembly Water Quality Hearing

Good morning Chairs Englebright, Gottfried and Fahy and members of the Committees on Environmental Conservation and Health and Subcommittee on Oversight of the Department of Environmental Conservation. My name is Kayla Bogdanowicz and I'm here representing the Alliance to Prevent Legionnaires' Disease. I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony in response to the 2017-18 budget allocation for improving drinking water quality in New York State.

The Alliance to Prevent Legionnaires' Disease is a nonprofit public health advocacy group dedicated to reducing the occurrence of Legionnaires' disease. They do this by promoting public research, education, best practices for water management, and advocating for comprehensive policies to combat and investigate this preventable disease. The Alliance works to bring together all stakeholders to partner in reducing incidences of Legionnaires' disease and other waterborne illnesses.

*Legionella* are ubiquitous in natural aquatic ecosystems. The bacteria are transported from source water into the distribution system where they can latch onto and grow in the biofilm present within public piping. Over time and accelerated by a disruption event like construction, flooding or a water main break, slugs of *Legionella* can dislodge from biofilm within the pipes—infesting the water that then travels into our homes and buildings.

Vulnerable populations—like the elderly and smokers—and those with compromised immune systems are particularly susceptible to Legionnaires' disease, making it an important public health problem. Around the country, rates of Legionnaires' disease continue to climb and New York State is no exception. In fact, New York State consistently leads the nation in the number of annual reported cases of Legionnaires' disease. To date, there have been more than 932 reported cases of Legionnaires' disease across the state, with more than half having been reported Upstate. This is a 54 percent increase in statewide cases over last year, in which there were a total of 604 cases over the same period of time.

While the City and State of New York have taken regulatory action in response to this disease, the rise in cases clearly indicates a growing problem—one that requires a new, more systematic approach. For these reasons, we continue to advocate for a broader, more comprehensive set of solutions.

Our recommendations include:

- A public communication protocol that advises the community in advance of any planned disruption to the system, or immediately during an unplanned disruption.
- Requiring more comprehensive investigations—for both single cases and outbreaks—that include the public water supply and distribution system to more accurately identify the bacteria's source.
- Encourage utilities to consider whether total organic carbon removal at the treatment plant and implementation of a minimum residual disinfectant throughout the distribution system might foster more effective use of chlorine in public water disinfection.

Westchester County has already been awarded \$2.1 million to finance Biologic Nutrient Removal and Total Chlorine Residual Control at the New Rochelle water treatment plant to help bolster the effectiveness of their chlorine disinfectant.

The 2017-18 Budget designated at least \$150 million for inter-municipal water infrastructure projects in the form of grants. Municipalities whose goals include tackling the threat of waterborne pathogens should be able to apply for these funds to improve communications between water facility managers and the public, facilitate comprehensive investigations in the event of Legionnaires' cases, or implement a minimum disinfectant residual and total organic carbon reduction program in addition to other water infrastructure upgrades.

These types of investments will help to inhibit the growth of *Legionella* bacteria in the public water distribution system so that we have greater confidence in the quality of water entering premise plumbing, where efforts are already underway to combat this bacteria. Efforts like these can effectively reduce the risk of disease from a wide variety of waterborne pathogens, save on healthcare costs associated with waterborne illness and prevent individuals from contracting preventable diseases with long-term affects like Legionnaires' disease.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments on the implementation of this funding and the impact it could have on a variety of important public health issues. We hope this information can be used to help keep New Yorkers safe from the threat of Legionnaires' disease and other waterborne illnesses. If you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to ask me now or contact me at a later time. We are here to be a resource and help in whatever way we can.