NYPIRG NEWS RELEASE

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For more information:
Blair Horner 518 727-4506, bhorner@nypirg.org

STATE DATA SHOWING NEW YORK STATE'S SCHOOLS WITH THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE USED FOR DRINKING, COOKING AND BEVERAGE MAKING CONTAINING LEAD CONTAMINATION

NEW SEARCH TOOL ALLOWS NYERS TO EASILY SHOW SCHOOL-BY-SCHOOL RESULTS FOR LEAD IN DRINKING WATER

Albany, N.Y. New York State Health Department's most recent data identified New York schools as having had the highest percentage of drinking water outlets, cooking, ice machines, etc. containing high levels of lead. The data was released in a new analysis by the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG). Exposure to lead is hazardous to public health.

Exposure to lead is of particular concern when it comes to children. Their growing bodies act as a sponge when it comes to lead. As a result, it is of critical importance that we eliminate as many sources of exposure as possible. The well documented social costs of childhood lead poisoning include learning impairments, behavioral problems, lost IQ points and a range of serious physical ailments.

Lead found in drinking water, particularly in schools, is an especially pernicious threat. From the World Health Organization to Center for Disease Control to the U.S. EPA – the health community is clear that there is *no safe* level of exposure to lead.

Today's data released by NYPIRG showed which schools had the highest percent of drinking water outlets exceeding the state's 5ppb standard for lead for every county in New York, as well as a ranking of the state legislative districts in which the schools with the highest percentages were found across the state analysis reviews state data self-reported from schools testing drinking water outlets water outlets used for drinking, cooking and beverage making.

The state data is the most recent available. Excessive lead levels should have triggered remediation. NYPIRG's website will add new test results as it becomes available.

NYPIRG unveiled a new web-based tool in order to make it easier for parents, educators, lawmakers, and the public at large, to monitor schools' lead results. The information is provided in a map format allowing the user to "drill down" into a particular county to find a relevant school's results. Maps are provided by county, state Assembly district, and state Senate district.

Background:
One decade ago, New York took its first steps in combating the threat of lead in water in the state's school buildings. In 2016, a law was enacted that required K-12 schools to test for lead in water supplies used for drinking, cooking and beverage making and if levels were found to exceed 15 parts per billion (ppb), remediation was required. In 2021, that level was dropped to 5 ppb and all public and charter

schools are required to test every drinking water outlet, cooking, ice machines, etc. at least once every three years.

Unfortunately, state data shows that it is urgent to move beyond *testing* and instead move toward *prevention*. A recent report, released by NYPIRG and the Environment America Research & Policy Center, *Get The Lead Out New York,* examined recent test results available from the state Health Department. That report showed that despite ten years of "testing and fixing," lead contamination in school drinking water from Montauk to Buffalo remains common. The state data shows:

- 12,500 water outlets at New York State public schools tested *above* the state's 5 ppb threshold for lead; and
- 42% of school buildings across New York state (nearly 2,000 schools) reported *at least one water outlet* used for drinking or cooking had lead levels that exceeded 5 ppb.

The groups recommended that state and local officials implement the following policies as quickly as possible to address the widespread threat of lead contamination in school drinking water:

- Require the installation of lead-capturing filters on all taps used for drinking, cooking and beverage preparation.
- Set a 1 ppb limit on lead in school drinking water, a policy recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- New York state school districts should begin implementing these steps as soon as possible, not wait for Albany to mandate action.

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