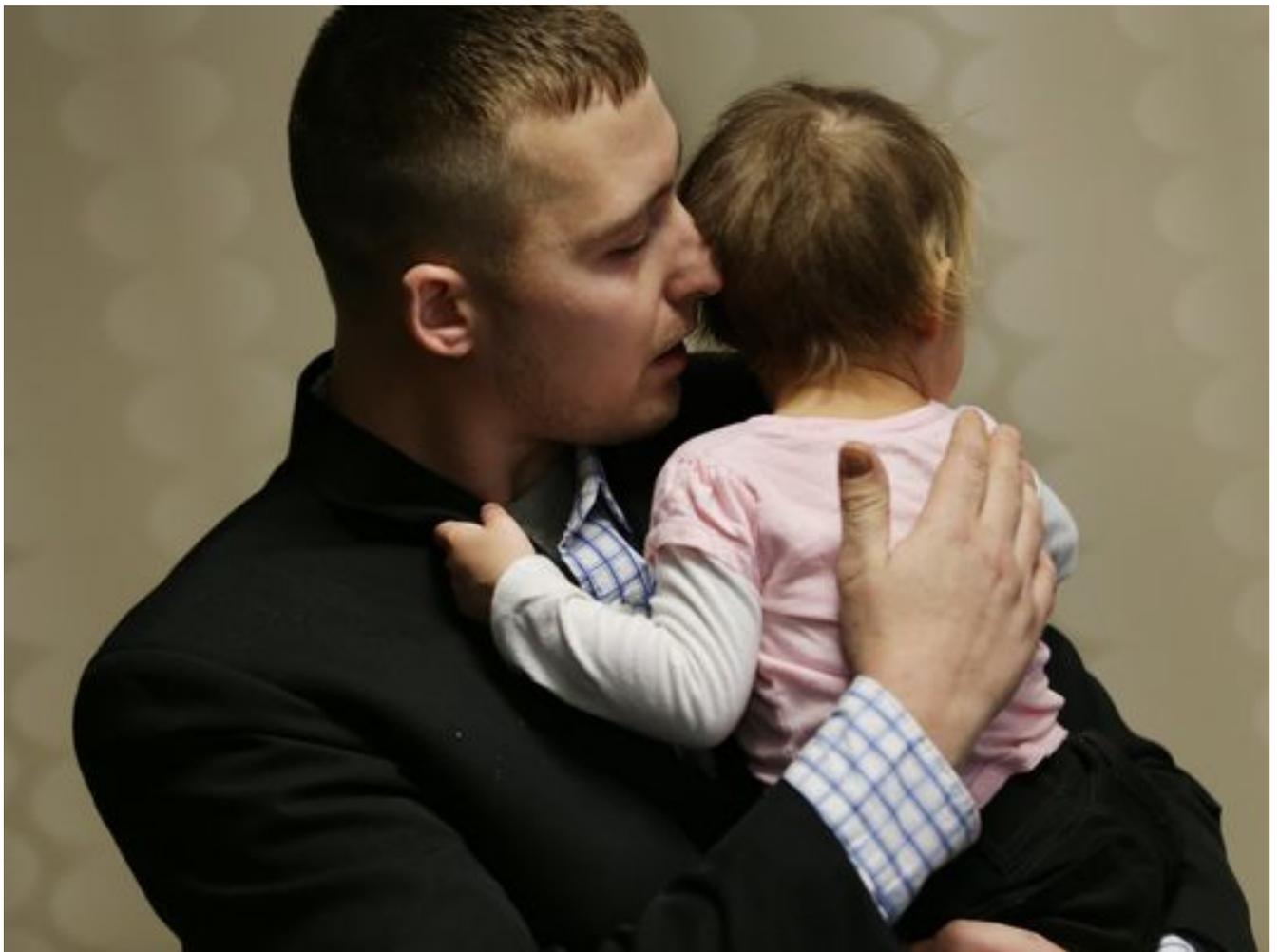


Detroit Free Press
PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Family of lead-poisoned Flint girl, 2, files suit

[Katrease Stafford](#), Detroit Free Press 6:40 p.m. EST February 8, 2016



(Photo: Romain Blanquart, Detroit Free Press)

Flint resident Luke Waid had a gut feeling something was wrong when his 2-year-old daughter recently went from being a bubbly, energetic child to anxious and constantly irritable.

Waid's worst fears were confirmed when his daughter's blood test results showed the toddler suffering from lead poisoning after ingesting Flint's contaminated water.

"She's constantly irritable," Waid said Monday, while consoling Sophia. "She's constantly irritable. These guys (his children) don't have a voice of their own so I have to be their voice. I have to stand behind my children. If I didn't feel so betrayed, I wouldn't have brought it this far. They (state officials) could have told us, and we could have had a home filtration system set up so it wouldn't have gotten this far."

Waid, along with his lawyers, announced Monday that a federal lawsuit has been filed against several State of Michigan and Flint officials, including Gov. Rick Snyder, former Flint emergency manager Darnell Earley and former Flint Mayor Dayne Walling.

Waid said he's concerned about the consequences the lead will have on his daughter's brain development. Blood-lead levels of 5 or greater are considered to be toxic. Sophia's blood lead levels tested at 14, according to the family.

"We don't know what's going to come in the future," Waid said. "I'm uncertain. I'm no doctor, but it's really putting the parents in between a rock and a hard spot. ... It seems like our city officials do not care."

Lead exposure in children younger than 6 can damage organs, slow development, lead to learning and behavioral problems, and more. "At critical times, including during gestation and her developmental years, the minor plaintiff has been exposed to damaging levels of lead and other toxic substances," the lawsuit states.

A Detroit-based law firm, McKeen & Associates, and two New York law firms, Napoli Shkolnik and Slater Slater Schulman, will represent the family in the lawsuit, which was filed Monday in federal court. Shkolnik has managed more than 150 lead poisoning cases

and Schulman has expertise in lead poisoning cases.

According to the law firms, this is the first individual, non class action brought against the city of Flint and state of Michigan on behalf of victims of the lead poisoning of Flint's water supply.

"Even when these officials knew of a lead problem, they failed to act, thus resulting in an epidemic of lead poisoning," said Brian McKeen, managing partner of McKeen & Associates, at a Monday news conference. "This child is but one of literally thousands of Flint residents who've been affected. ... They, like any parent have suffered tremendous anguish knowing that their child has been poisoned and faces an uncertain medical and developmental future."

Adam Slater, the attorney who specializes in lead poisoning cases, said individual cases often get "lost" in class actions and they believed it would better serve the little girl to do it this way.

According to the lawsuit, Sophia has experienced serious physical and emotional issues due to the contaminated water, including skin rashes, digestive problems, infections, excessive crying and irritability and the inability to sleep at night.

Waid said he was relieved to know his youngest child, 2-month-old Luke Waid Jr., does not suffer from lead poisoning. His wife, Michelle Rodriguez, stopped drinking the tap water in August 2014, which was when they found out Sophia had been poisoned.

"For a short period of time we did keep drinking it not knowing it was so bad for us," Waid said. "The smell got so bad and we noticed the water was discolored. You don't even want to put your child in the water because it's so bad."

The lawsuit is the latest in a flurry announced over the past several weeks.

Southfield lawyer Geoffrey Fieger [filed a \\$100-million lawsuit](#) Feb. 2 against McLaren Flint Hospital and the State of Michigan, saying they did nothing to combat an outbreak of [Legionnaires' disease](#) that killed

at least one person during the Flint water crisis. The lawsuit was filed on behalf of four Genesee County residents who contracted the disease, including the family of Debra Kidd, who died in August, seven days after entering the emergency room with a headache, according to the suit.

Flint's drinking water became contaminated with lead in April 2014 after the city, while under the control of a state-appointed emergency manager, switched its source to the Flint River as a temporary cost-cutting move and the state Department of Environmental Quality failed to require the addition of needed corrosion-control chemicals.

As a result, corrosive water caused lead to leach from pipes, joints and fixtures, causing many citizens to receive water with unsafe lead levels. The state has told residents not to drink the water without filtering and says it is treating all Flint children as having been exposed to unsafe levels of lead.

The FBI is now investigating the contamination of Flint's drinking water amid a growing public outcry. Last week, Flint Mayor Karen Weaver [called for the immediate removal](#) of the city's lead-contaminated pipes from the water distribution system. U.S. Rep. Candice Miller, R-Harrison Township, proposed an emergency \$1-billion grant to be authorized through the Environmental Protection Agency, and two Democratic U.S. senators and U.S. Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Flint Township, proposed up to \$400 million in dollar-for-dollar matching funds from the state to do much the same thing.

The U.S. Attorney's Office announced Jan. 5 that it was assisting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in a Flint drinking water investigation and Gina Balaya, a spokeswoman, said federal prosecutors are "working with a multi-agency investigation team on the Flint water contamination matter, including the FBI, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, EPA's Office of Inspector General, and EPA's Criminal Investigation Division."

McKeen said he thinks the case might go on for several years, since lead poisoning can affect victims for several years or their entire lives.

"The long-term fallout in terms of the neurological cognitive

impairment of the children in this community is one of the greatest potential damages and that's going to take years and years for this to fully evolve," McKeen said.

*Contact Katrease Stafford: 313-223-4759
or kstafford@freepress.com.*