



Parents of 'Tragic' 2-Year-Old With Lead Poisoning Sue Flint

by TRACY CONNOR

When doctors detected lead in 1-year-old Sophia Rodriguez Waid's blood, her family did everything they could to fix the situation, spending months living with friends and relatives and scarce dollars remodeling their home in Flint, Michigan.

But the amount of the toxin in the little girl's blood only got higher -- and the worried parents say local officials threatened to call child protective services on them.

It wasn't until the family moved in with a relative who wasn't on Flint's water system that Sophia's blood began returning to normal, the first evidence the family had that the service line under the street -- and not their home -- was the culprit.

Now, with Sophia facing an uncertain future, her parents are filing a lawsuit against the city and a raft of government officials they say lied to Flint's residents and put children like her in harm's way. "It's a crying shame they had to put all these children through this," Luke Waid told NBC News on Monday. "It's heartbreaking because my daughter doesn't have a voice of her own."



Sophia Rodriguez Waid, 2, had elevated lead levels in her blood after drinking Flint water. Courtesy Luke Waid / via Facebook

Waid and fiancée Michelle Rodriguez had Sophia, their first child, in July 2014. At 6 months old, she was tested for lead and the results were normal.

But at her 1-year followup, the levels were high and doctors told Waid, a welder, how to find and get rid of lead in their home, he said.

He said he didn't suspect the water because he'd had it tested when he bought the house and it was fine.

But that test was done when Flint was buying water from Detroit. Just three months before Sophia's alarming blood test, the city had

started using water from the Flint River to save money. The new water was more corrosive, and under the city streets, it began eating away at 25,000 lead service lines, eventually leaching the heavy metal into the drinking water.

"We changed our whole life. We remodeled our home and lived in hotels and with family for months," Waid said.

But Waid and Rodriguez were still living in Flint, and the couple says Sophia's lead level didn't decrease. It went up, hitting 14 micrograms/dl, well above the 5 micrograms/dl level that the CDC says requires public health action.

"They threatened us with child protective services if it didn't go down," Waid said.

They moved to Rodriguez's sister's house, which had its own well, and Sophia's levels began dropping, he said.

The family's lawyers, Brian McKeen of Detroit and two New York-based lawyers with experience in lead cases, say damage was already done to young Sophia, though it could be years before they know how much.

In addition, Rodriguez was drinking Flint water throughout her second pregnancy. Luke Jr. is now 2 months old and the family is anxiously waiting to get his blood tested.

"This family has gone through hell," said one of the attorneys, Hunter Shkolnik. "They literally abandoned their house. This young family almost lost their child over this. This is as tragic an event as I have ever seen."

The suit, which does not specify damages, names the city of Flint and the state of Michigan and government officials as defendants.

Another lawyer for the family, Adam Slater, said they are arguing the water system was not strictly a governmental function so the city and state can't use governmental immunity as a shield.

Waid said his dream was that his children would have "bright futures," and now they are at risk of cognitive delays and physical problems for years to come.

He said he's worried -- and angry at officials who made the switch to the Flint River, who didn't add anti-corrosion agents to the water, and who didn't respond with urgency to the early warnings of lead in the water.

"The point is they didn't tell us, and I know they knew," he said. Local officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment. A lawyer for the state declined to comment because he had not yet seen court papers.