



Flint Family Sues Michigan State Over Toddler's Lead Poisoning

Two-year-old Sophia Waid tested with a blood lead level of 14 after drinking Flint water. A blood lead level above five is considered toxic.

The parents of a two-year-old girl suffering from lead poisoning amid the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, filed a federal lawsuit Monday against the state and municipal officials, including Michigan Governor Rick Snyder and former Flint emergency manager Darnell Earley, who have both dodged responsibility for the crisis.

"I have to stand behind my children," Flint resident Luke Waid told Detroit Free Press, explaining that Sophia's blood tests showed highly elevated levels of lead. "If I didn't feel so betrayed, I wouldn't have brought it this far."

The family, along with the rest of Flint, were told for months that the water was safe to drink despite a switch in Flint's water source from Lake Huron to the long-polluted and corrosive Flint River. Only after researchers proved that children were suffering lead poisoning did authorities finally respond to the crisis last fall.

Sophia was one of those children. The toddler's blood results showed her blood lead levels had spiked to 14, almost triple the threshold of five considered to be toxic. A year earlier her blood lead levels had tested normal.

Waid and his partner Michelle Rodriguez never suspected the problem was the water, which they had tested when they bought their home, Waid told NBC news. The family struggled to identify the problem while their child suffered a host of emotional and physical problems including skin rashes, infections, digestive issues, and constant irritability.

Michigan authorities didn't acknowledge the crisis for more than a year after Sophia's tests showed she suffered from lead poisoning.

"Even when these officials knew of a lead problem, they failed to act, thus resulting in an epidemic of lead poisoning," Brian McKeen, one of the family's legal representatives, said in a press conference on Monday, according to Detroit Free Press. "This child is but one of literally thousands of Flint residents who've been affected."

The lawsuit names the city of Flint and the state of Michigan and several officials as defendants.

The family is worried about Sophia's development and how lead poisoning will affect her in the long term. On the other hand, they are furious at officials who made dangerous changes to the water system and didn't react promptly when concerns about water quality were raised.

"The point is they didn't tell us, and I know they knew," Wait told NBC News.

The lawsuit comes as Michigan Governor Rick Snyder refused to testify at the second congressional hearing on the Flint water crisis this week. Snyder was not invited to the first hearing last week, at which former unelected Flint and Detroit Public Schools emergency manager Darnell Earley refused to testify despite a subpoena.

The first hearing concluded that the Flint's water crisis points to a failure at "every level of government" and that the response was slow despite warnings of contamination long before residents were informed.

The new legal battle also comes after a coalition of local residents and advocacy groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, filed a lawsuit at the end of January aimed at pressuring Flint and Michigan authorities to replace corroded water pipes.

Investigations are currently underway to get to the bottom of why Flint was allowed to switch its water source to the long-polluted and corrosive Flint River without corrosion control chemicals that could have prevented massive infrastructure damage that caused pipes to leach lead into Flint's drinking water, poisoning children.

Many have interpreted the slow response to complaints over water in Flint as a consequence of structural poverty, inequality, and environmental racism.

Flint's water source was switched in April 2014, and complaints about water quality surfaced within months. Michigan officials provided bottled water to state employees in Flint in January 2015, a full year before providing safe water to Flint residents.

It wasn't until October 2015 that Flint's water was switched back to Lake Huron water system, leaving a massive infrastructure problem of heavily corroded pipes and lead contamination as the legacy of the polluted water that was allowed to flow into Flint homes for 18 months.

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