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Gov. Wolf Announces Billion-Dollar Plan to Fix Toxic Schools, Address Lead Across Pennsylvania

Harrisburg, PA – Governor Tom Wolf today presented a series of proposed 2020-21 budget items totaling more than \$1.1 billion to support reducing the risks to Pennsylvanians of lead and asbestos, and remediating existing toxins in schools, day care centers, homes, and public water systems.

“Decades ago, well-intentioned Pennsylvanians constructed our homes, schools, waterways and other structures out of asbestos and lead because they were thought to be harmless, even superior materials,” Gov. Wolf said. “Now we know the serious harm both can cause. To build a better Pennsylvania, we first need to fix our foundation, which is why the five lead and asbestos removal initiatives I’m outlining today are so important.

Gov. Wolf’s proposed budget investments to address asbestos and lead include:

Expanding the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program to Schools

Governor Wolf is proposing that up to \$1 billion in grants from the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) be used for lead and asbestos remediation in schools, a problem plaguing many of the state’s aging school buildings and causing health concerns for students and their parents, teachers, and staff.

RACP is a commonwealth grant program administered by the Office of the Budget for the acquisition and construction of regional economic, cultural, civic, recreational, and historical improvement projects.

RACP projects are authorized in the Redevelopment Assistance section of a Capital Budget Itemization Act, have a regional or multi-jurisdictional impact, and generate substantial increases or maintain current levels of employment, tax revenues, or other measures of economic activity.

Leveraging CHIP Health Services Initiative

The Department of Human Services is working with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for a Health Services Initiative (HSI) to improve the health of children and families in

Pennsylvania by increasing funding of lead remediation activities in places where children have been exposed to high levels of lead.

Remediation projects could include paint, water, and other sources of contamination. We are currently contemplating enhancing funding opportunities for current HUD grant recipients statewide, but also building infrastructure in 1-2 new areas to increase the regions in Pennsylvania ready and able to assist in lead remediation efforts moving forward. Funding will also be made available for training and certification to increase the number of individuals who are EPA-certified to complete lead remediation in areas where there are shortages of individuals to do this work.

The plan is to have the program operational next state fiscal year. With a \$4 million state investment, \$10 million in federal dollars could be leveraged annually for an annual total of \$14 million to support efforts around lead remediation.

Transferring PENNVEST Grant Funds

Legislation recently passed in Congress allows a state to transfer amounts from its clean water state revolving fund to its drinking water state revolving fund in order to address a threat to public health as a result of heightened exposure to lead in drinking water. Specifically, a state may transfer no more than 5 percent of the cumulative amount of the federal grant dollars awarded for its clean water state revolving fund to its drinking water state revolving fund. It also requires that states coordinate with EPA to get their buy-in for the transfer.

By taking advantage of this new flexibility, PENNVEST may be able to free up to \$90 million for Pennsylvania to address lead in drinking water by providing grants for lead service line replacement statewide. The amount transferred will not have a negative impact on future projects that could have been funded with that money and will be determined based on the amount of available dollars at the time the program begins.

PENNVEST has proposed to spend the next year working with communities to identify shovel-ready projects that can then be funded in 2021. Potential grant recipients will need to do testing, feasibility studies, and other consulting work next year to prep for projects.

Convening Lead Based Paint Hazard Reduction Program Grant Recipients The Lead Based Paint Hazard Reduction Program helps communities address housing-related health and safety hazards, in addition to lead-based paint hazards through the Lead Hazard control and Healthy Homes grants. The [state](#), as well as several local communities, received notice of \$22.5 million in funding awards in late September 2019. All recipients will target funds towards homes for low and very-low income families with children and will work with medical and social service providers.

At the most recent lead roundtable hosted by the commonwealth, the request was made for the state to convene all Pennsylvania recipients to ensure collaboration in implementation – a project the Department of Health is working to implement in the coming weeks under the direction of Gov. Wolf.

Implementing Lead Testing in School and Child Care Program Drinking Water Grant

Authorized under the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, the Environmental Protection Agency's Lead Testing in School and Child Care Program Drinking Water Grant creates a program to assist with voluntary testing for lead in drinking water at schools and

child care programs. The grant opportunity was announced in 2018 and applications were due this year however, award notices have not yet been issued.

Pennsylvania submitted a grant application, which included the support of PENNVEST and the departments of education, environmental protection, health, and human services. If awarded, approximately \$1.7 million in funds will be used to develop and implement a lead testing program in schools and child care facilities throughout the state. This testing will include the prioritization of facilities serving younger children (ages 6 and under), underserved and low-income communities, and facilities that are older and more likely to contain lead plumbing.

Funding will support the testing of 3,000 schools and child care facilities.

Gov. Wolf was joined by Sen. Vincent Hughes and Rep. Jason Dawkins, who provided remarks, as well as numerous other legislators and advocates in support of these budget proposals.

“Far too much of Pennsylvania is toxic and unsafe as a result of lead and asbestos,” Sen. Hughes said. “Our homes, childcare centers, and schools suffer from serious disrepair and long-term neglect. Thank you, Gov. Wolf, for making a significant financial commitment to clean up these vital, necessary and fundamental places in our community. We intend to win on your proposal and to use that victory to propel us to a long-term even more robust investment.”

“I’m inspired by the plan and bold leadership that the Governor has displayed today with this announcement,” Sen. Jay Costa said. “Children across the state have been exposed to dangerous chemicals and crumbling facilities for years, and we know that it impacts their physical and mental health for their entire lives. Governor Wolf’s programs outlined today will save future generations of children from these problems.”

“The unhealthy dangers of lead contamination are proven without any doubt, and lawmakers should enthusiastically support the governor’s initiative,” said Rep. Frank Dermody. “It will make a critical difference in many thousands of lives.”

“Our children deserve to learn and our teachers deserve to teach in schools that don’t make them sick,” Rep. Jason Dawkins said. “This is something that we can all agree on. But for far too long, our children, teachers and anyone else who has entered school buildings in Philadelphia have literally taken their own lives in their hands. Why? Because often lead and asbestos were lurking inside. My delegation colleagues and I are overjoyed at the news that Gov. Wolf will be making investments in lead and asbestos remediation projects in our schools. Finally, we can take the steps to make our school buildings safe places to learn and to teach.”

Gov. Wolf first introduced his [Lead-Free PA](#) initiative in August 2019 to call attention to the need for a law requiring universal blood level testing of children according to federal guidelines, and to convene regional task forces to address specific local needs.

A Lead-Free PA task force convened in December to gather the input of communities and their partners toward compiling a complete list of needs so that funding, when allocated, goes directly to programs and initiatives that produce swift and measurable results toward protecting Pennsylvanians.

“Together, these programs have the potential to assist thousands of Pennsylvanians with living healthier lives free of lead and asbestos danger,” Gov. Wolf said. “We have the opportunity to

correct the past, and to build a brighter future. Pennsylvania should be a place free of lead and asbestos.”

MEDIA CONTACT: J.J. Abbott, 717-783-1116

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