

## **Written Testimony Opposing Bill S.1517 and H.2548: The Ban on Water Fluoridation**

Submitted to the Joint Committee on Public Health

To the Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Public Health,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Bill **S.1517** and **HB.2548**, which proposes the banning of water fluoridation across our communities. This testimony is submitted with the utmost respect for the legislative process and a vision toward safeguarding public health in Massachusetts. Water fluoridation has been widely recognized as one of the most significant public health achievements of the 20th century, and its benefits, rooted in decades of research and practice, unequivocally merit its continuation.

### **The Proven Benefits of Water Fluoridation**

Water fluoridation is a cornerstone of preventive dentistry. By introducing controlled levels of fluoride into community water supplies, this practice has consistently demonstrated its ability to reduce the prevalence of dental caries, particularly in vulnerable populations such as children, seniors, and those with limited access to dental care. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), fluoridation decreases cavities by approximately 25% over a lifetime and the CDC has recognized it as one of the ten great public health achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The American Dental Association (ADA) and the World Health Organization (WHO), the American Medical Association (AMA), as well as the Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) have similarly endorsed fluoridation as a safe and effective measure in promoting oral health.

Dental caries (tooth decay) not only cause pain and discomfort but also results in more severe health complications when left untreated. For individuals with limited financial resources, untreated cavities can lead to systemic infections, hospitalizations, and even result in death. Untreated dental conditions can also contribute to chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease. By preventing such outcomes, water fluoridation serves as a cost-effective, community-wide solution to improving overall health outcomes.

### **Scientific Consensus and Safety**

The safety of water fluoridation has been extensively studied, with scientific consensus affirming its efficacy and minimal risk when conducted within regulated parameters. The optimal fluoride level, set by the U.S. Public Health Service, is maintained at 0.7 milligrams per liter, far below the threshold where adverse effects might occur. Studies and meta-analyses conducted over decades have demonstrated that these levels are safe, posing no significant risk to human health.

The concern over fluoride has often stemmed from misinformation, selective use of data, or misunderstanding of its dose-dependent nature. High concentrations of fluoride, occurring naturally in certain areas or through uncontrolled industrial exposure, have indeed shown

negative effects, but such cases are entirely unrelated to regulated community water systems. The controlled addition of fluoride in civic water supplies is fundamentally different, as it adheres to stringent safety standards implemented by regulatory agencies.

## **Equity in Public Health**

Water fluoridation is a uniquely egalitarian public health measure, benefiting all individuals regardless of socioeconomic status. Unlike dental treatments that require access to professionals and financial resources, fluoridation inherently reaches every member of a community. It is particularly impactful for children living in disadvantaged circumstances, whose families may not have access to regular dental care or fluoride-containing products such as toothpaste and mouthwash.

Eliminating fluoridation would disproportionately harm these underserved populations, exacerbating oral health disparities across socioeconomic and racial lines. The most vulnerable members of our society—who already face significant barriers to health care—would bear the brunt of the adverse consequences that would follow this ban.

## **Economic Implications**

From an economic perspective, the cost savings associated with water fluoridation are substantial. The ADA estimates that for every dollar spent on fluoridation, municipalities save approximately \$20 in dental treatment costs. A new study published 6/6/2025 conducted by HSDM and Mass General Brigham quantifies the impact a nationwide fluoride ban would have on oral health, showing a substantial increase in dental decay and dental care costs, particularly for publicly insured and uninsured children. [Reference: Choi SE, et al. JAMA Health Forum. 2025;doi:10.1001/jamahealthforum.2025.1166.] Lisa Simon, MD, DMD, and Sung Eun Choi, PhD estimate that by banning water fluoridation over the following 5 years 25.4 million more teeth will decay at a cost of \$9.8 Billion.

Banning water fluoridation, as proposed in Bill **S.1517** and **H.2548**, would impose long-term financial costs on individuals and local governments alike. Increased rates of dental caries would necessitate more dental visits, higher expenditures on treatments, and greater reliance on state-funded programs such as Medicaid. These cascading effects would strain public health budgets and deepen financial inequalities.

Municipal water fluoridation is a proven preventive strategy that reduces the burden on both families and public health systems, alleviating avoidable expenses that arise from untreated cavities and emergency dental procedures.

## **Public Opinion and Historical Context**

Water fluoridation has enjoyed widespread public support since its inception in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1945. Communities across the United States have recognized its profound impact

on oral health and embraced it as a symbol of civic progress. Massachusetts, too, has been a pioneer in embracing science-backed public health measures. The removal of fluoridation would not only undermine this legacy of leadership but also set a concerning precedent for disregarding evidence-based practices.

Public opposition to fluoridation is often driven by misinformation rather than scientific understanding. As legislators, I implore you to prioritize well-founded research and empirical evidence over unfounded fears. With the backing of leading health organizations and a wealth of data supporting its benefits, water fluoridation stands as a measure that embodies the principles of sound policymaking.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I respectfully urge the Joint Committee on Public Health to reject Bill **S.1517** and **H.2548** and preserve water fluoridation as a critical public health measure for Massachusetts. Its benefits are vast, its safety is assured, and its impact on health equity is unparalleled. By opposing this bill, you will reaffirm your commitment to advancing the well-being of all residents, particularly those most in need of protection.

Let us not turn away from decades of progress and the overwhelming scientific consensus that supports water fluoridation. Instead, let us champion evidence-based policies that enhance health outcomes, address disparities, and promote the collective welfare of our communities.

Thank you for your attention to this serious public health issue. I welcome any questions or opportunities for further discussion.

Sincerely,

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