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**Before the Senate Standing Committees on Health and Environmental Conservation and
the Assembly Standing Committees on Health and Environmental Conservation**

On Water Quality and Contamination

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Smithtown, NY**



Good morning, Chairpersons Hannon, O'Mara, Gottfried and Englebright and members of the Health and Environmental Conservation Committees joining us here today. I am pleased to be here to discuss New York's aggressive approach to monitoring for and eliminating contaminants in our drinking water in Long Island and around the State. I'm joined by Brad Hutton, Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Public Health, who has been with the Department of Health for more than two decades and Dr. Lloyd Wilson, a 34-year veteran of water issues at the Department of Health. Also present with us today are Dr. Nathan Graber and Dr. Roger Sokol from the Department's Center for Environmental Health.

These dedicated public servants have made a career of working to ensure water quality and protect public health for all New Yorkers.

Access to clean drinking water is one of the defining issues of our time. The development of clean drinking water enabled the growth of cities, reduced mortality, and is one of the greatest public health accomplishments in history. At the same time, the rapid rise of manufacturing created the economic success of our state and our nation, employing citizens, enabling us to provide for our families, and building our country into a powerhouse -- but it has also left us with a trail of significant environmental pollution, the consequences of which we are only just beginning to understand.

Over the past two weeks, I have testified twice before the Legislature to present the way the federal government regulates, or does not regulate, contaminants in drinking water and how the State enforces these guidelines. Today, I am going to focus on how the Department of Health identifies contaminants, and reduces and eliminates exposure in the water supply. I will also discuss the specific water quality issues Long Island is facing.

Across the State, our proactive, complex multi-barrier system ensures water quality and removes regulated and unregulated contaminants. Its central components are:

- 1) The source of the water,
- 2) The pumps and pipes that convey the water to the treatment plant,
- 3) The treatment plant, and
- 4) The distribution system, which often includes water storage facilities.

As water moves through the system from the source to your tap, built-in protections are at work. Disinfection removes microbes and biological contaminants. Corrosion control measures such as adding orthophosphate reduce lead leaching from lead services lines and internal building plumbing. Minerals are removed for taste and color. And as we all now know, filtration systems such as granulated activated carbon (GAC) are used to remove chemical contaminants.

Here on Long Island, surrounded by beautiful shores on three sides and New York City on the fourth, we have two county health departments and multiple public water systems serving residents. Long Island has a unique geography -- a sole source aquifer, a highly sensitive ecosystem and natural intrusion of salt water --- and also has a long history as the home base for military operations and a rich history of agriculture that includes extensive use of pesticides and fertilizers.

In addition, dependence upon a sole source aquifer presents unique challenges to the Island. That's why the Department works closely with the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the local health and water entities to protect the drinking water, reduce or eliminate contaminants, and respond to Long Island's specific challenges.

When we discover an organic or inorganic compound in the drinking water, it's a red flag that signals to us that we must spring into immediate action, regardless of the level of contamination. The action is always the same – we seek out the source of the contaminant and take action to fix the problem.

Sometimes it means connecting to a different well at another location or drilling a new well. But that is not always an option, especially in Long Island, given its unique geography. Thus, treatment of the drinking water using state-of-the-art water treatment technologies is a must. But technology changes so quickly that even filtration methods that today might be the most modern, top-of-the-line system on the market will not be effective in addressing all of the emerging contaminants we're facing and learning more about every day.

For instance, Hoosick Falls, a village in Upstate New York, received millions in state funding to upgrade their filtration system in 2009 only to learn later that the new system would not remove PFOA, a contaminant, which was discovered in the water supply years after the system was installed.

On Long Island, some contaminants, such as 1, 4 Dioxane, are not easily treated by existing systems, so we need to explore the newest innovative developments in technology to ensure we're being proactive in addressing these challenges.

That's why Governor Cuomo today announced a significant investment in Long Island's economy and the future treatment of its drinking water. This is an investment the whole State will benefit from: \$5 million for SUNY Stony Brook's Center for Clean Water Technology to develop state-of-the-art treatment systems to address emerging contaminants in drinking water.

These funds, in addition to the \$3.5 million from the Environmental Protection Fund that the State previously committed to support the Center for Clean Water Technology, will allow the Center to continue to develop new technologies to improve both drinking water and wastewater quality on Long Island and throughout the State through:

- Grants for water suppliers to develop and conduct pilot projects to test cutting-edge contaminant filtration and treatment technologies;
- Research needed for the development, evaluation and advancement of these technologies; and
- Commercialization of viable technologies to create economic development opportunities for the region and State.

Through partnerships like this, New York is leveraging technologies to stay ahead of emerging water quality issues. Last Friday, my Department informed the Suffolk County Water Authority

that it will approve the use of Advanced Oxidative Process (AOP), a cutting-edge drinking water treatment technology to remove 1, 4 Dioxane. This unregulated contaminant has historically been used in industrial solvents on Long Island and is not readily removed by traditional water treatment technologies.

Use of AOP for drinking water and other developing technologies mean that our treatment technologies systems will begin to catch up with our ability to monitor, detect, and identify unregulated contaminants. Perhaps one day our water treatment technologies will be able to remove contaminants before we even know they are there. Thanks to our partnerships with groups like the Center for Clean Water Technology, it's possible.

As we continue developing these new technologies, my Department will continue to emphasize monitoring and testing of drinking water for contaminants because this, along with treatment and action, is the cornerstone of our drinking water system. New York is a national leader in testing and monitoring. Our Wadsworth Laboratory is one of the most sophisticated in the nation. Wadsworth developed the testing methodology used in Vermont for PFOA and continues to receive requests from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other states to test their drinking water for them.

As you heard from Commissioner Seggos, another way we are staying ahead of these challenges is through the Water Quality Rapid Response Team that was established by Governor Cuomo in February. This multi-agency effort co-chaired by Commissioner Seggos and myself, was established to quickly identify and address critical drinking water contamination concerns in our communities. The mandate is simple and important:

First, we are developing a comprehensive action plan to enhance the State's existing drinking water, groundwater, and surface water protection programs. Second, we have established protocols to enable us to immediately and effectively address site-specific water quality issues wherever they arise.

The Water Quality Rapid Response Team has identified several communities in Suffolk County with PFOA and/or PFOS levels of potential concern. In Westhampton Beach, the UCMR data showed that PFOS had been detected in public water supply wells near the Gabreski Air National Guard Base—and the wells in question were taken offline. However, this data suggested that there might be more widespread contamination in the area, so DEC listed Gabreski as a potential Superfund site in July, and the County began sampling nearby private wells just weeks later.

My Department provided technical assistance throughout this process and commends Suffolk County for their swift action. Today, Commissioner Seggos officially listed Gabreski as a state superfund site, and the State will now be holding the Department of Defense responsible for funding the connection of impacted private wells to the public water supply. If DoD fails to comply, the State will cover these costs and seek reimbursement from the responsible party.

In addition, due to the relentless efforts of the Department, my colleagues at DEC, local, state and federal elected officials, water district representatives and community members, Northrup Grumman has committed to aggressively implementing and completing remedial activities by

2017 to address a hotspot of groundwater contamination in Bethpage Water District Plant 4. We, along with the residents, are pleased that remediation has finally begun. And the Department will continue to work with the County and representatives to actively monitor the public and private water supply.

Last week, we announced that the Administration will advance legislation to require the sampling of private wells upon construction or property sale. This legislation will also require landlords to sample wells and inform renters of the results. It is important to note, while we are here in Smithtown, that Suffolk County is one of few places that has local regulation for private wells and has worked collaboratively with my Department and DEC to connect homes on contaminated private wells to the public water supply. Over the past 20 years, the Department and the Environmental Facilities Corporation have provided hundreds of millions of dollars in financing to more than 150 such projects.

I wish to turn for a moment to other types of drinking water issues that Long Island experiences along with the rest of the State. On July 6, 2016, the Department's permanent regulations to reduce legionellosis risk through the registration, maintenance, monitoring, and inspection of cooling towers and to monitor and address legionella risk from premise water in hospitals and nursing homes went into effect. As you may recall, the Department issued emergency regulations in August of 2015 in response to the 138 cases of legionellosis identified in the South Bronx. Since then, the Department has been promoting cooling tower registration, improving coordination between state and local health departments during investigations and expanding education, technical support, and surveillance efforts.

Also, as we all know, children's growth and development are affected by lead poisoning. Lead has been identified in fixtures in 20% of Long Island schools. Last week, Governor Cuomo signed landmark legislation and we issued regulations that will help fix that problem and protect children from lead poisoning by requiring all school districts in the state to test by the end of October.

Together, the initiatives Commissioner Seggos and I have spoken about today and over the past two weeks amount to the largest annual investment in water infrastructure of any state in the nation. The purpose of all the actions we've outlined and all of the funding the state is providing is to find the next emerging contaminant sooner, identify the source more quickly, and eliminate it faster.

Whether it is a regulated or unregulated contaminant, a bacteria like legionella, or a metal like lead, we are committed to identifying it and getting it out of New York's drinking water. That is what we are doing in Long Island and what we are going to continue to do to protect the residents of New York State. I hope we will look back at these hearings as turning point in our statewide commitment to quality water. I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

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