

Testimony of Greta Zarro
Organizer at Food & Water Watch
Water Quality Hearing
Long Island, NY
September 12, 2016

My name is Greta Zarro, and I'm an organizer at Food & Water Watch, a national non-profit that fights for our most basic resources – the things, like water, we cannot live without. I want to thank you for holding this important hearing and for allowing me to speak.

Access to clean drinking water isn't just essential – it's also a human right. In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly affirmed the right of all people to clean drinking water. Of course, we know the right to water is violated daily – not only around the world but also here at home in New York. The ongoing public health nightmare in Hoosick Falls underscores just how far we have to go to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to clean, affordable water.

PFOA and PFOS pose a myriad of dangers to the people of Hoosick Falls, Newburgh, Long Island, and other communities across the country. The chemicals have been linked to cancers, thyroid issues, and other serious health problems.

[This February, Governor Cuomo claimed "we have been very active in Hoosick Falls from day one."](#) Of course, we all know that simply wasn't true. In fact the state waited nearly a year and a half – from the discovery of contamination until state officials finally warned local residents to avoid drinking the water. Even more troubling, [Politico reported in June that the Cuomo Administration resisted alerting the public](#) even after federal regulators warned senior health department officials that people in Hoosick Falls must be told their drinking water contained dangerous levels of PFOA.

This is unconscionable, and the people of Hoosick Falls and all New Yorkers deserve answers. Accountability goes beyond simply assigning blame. Some have dismissed this and other hearings as "finger-pointing," but how can New York expect to avoid similar problems in the future without a clear picture of what happened in the state's response to Hoosick Falls? Sadly, so far we've received few answers.

We still don't know exactly why the Cuomo Administration and town officials in Hoosick Falls waited so long to alert residents to what is clearly a public health crisis. Perhaps as importantly, we also don't know who knew what and when. This is unacceptable, and I urge those here today and other elected officials in the Assembly, Senate and in Congress to aggressively seek answers to these crucial questions. For their part, the Cuomo Administration has decided to deflect, blaming the federal EPA over and over again at the first two water quality hearings. This act is fooling no one, and it's time for the administration to stop the blame game and begin to do its job.

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We know of course that accountability alone will not solve the crisis we find ourselves in. We need a comprehensive plan to deal with water contamination from PFOA and similar chemicals. This must start with an aggressive plan for the residents of Hoosick Falls, Petersburg, Newburgh, and other communities that already suffer from contaminated water. The state must commit to ongoing biomonitoring – including blood testing – for these communities. Hoosick Falls residents have gone through one round of blood testing, but it's not clear how long the biomonitoring process will go on. The state should clear this up and commit to a long-term biomonitoring program paid for by the polluters. Without such a program, we risk putting the people of Hoosick Falls back in the dark – an unthinkable scenario given the year and a half that town residents drank poisoned water before being alerted.

Everyone here knows that coming up with a comprehensive plan to address the water crisis will be a politically difficult thing to do. Indeed, it took a huge amount of public pressure to even schedule these hearings, and there are many in government reluctant to admit any mistake even in the clear debacle that has been our response to the Hoosick Falls water crisis. These challenges are real but we must overcome them.

Both houses of the legislature – and both parties – must work together with the Cuomo Administration to protect our drinking water. Some things must rise above partisan politics. We owe it to the people of Hoosick Falls, Long Island and all New Yorkers to work together and come up with a real plan with real funding behind it to drastically improve not only our state's response to water contamination, but also our ability to identify contamination before it spirals into a true public health disaster.

One thing is clear; we can't continue to shortchange the Department of Environmental Conservation. Hoosick Falls must serve as a wake up call for the whole state – we've already seen other similar crises pop up on Long Island, in Newburgh, Petersburg and elsewhere. The DEC must have the resources it needs to identify and swiftly respond to instances of water contamination. I urge you to ensure that the state has the funding necessary to address our clean drinking water crisis.

These hearings have been an important and long overdue conversation, but it must be the first step rather than the last. We all tend to take our drinking water for granted – until there is a serious problem. Right now our right to water is at the forefront of New Yorkers' minds. Our government must rise to the challenge. New Yorkers deserve and expect their drinking water will be protected.