
SENATE BILL 5215

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2023 Regular Session

By Senators Robinson and Van De Wege

1 AN ACT Relating to water systems' notice to customers of public
2 health considerations; adding a new section to chapter 70A.125 RCW;
3 and creating a new section.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that:

6 (1) Public health is essential to Washington state residents of
7 all ages and ethnicities and that balancing public water systems with
8 an optimal level of fluoride is a proven mechanism for reducing
9 health disparities affecting people at all stages of life;

10 (2) More than 75 years of practice has shown that fluoridated
11 water promotes community oral health and prevents oral disease and
12 dental cavities. When tap water is fluoridated, people experience 25
13 percent less tooth decay over a lifetime. Today, while roughly 74
14 percent of the people in the United States are served by public water
15 systems that have effective levels of fluoride, only 56 percent of
16 Washingtonians receive the same benefit, leaving 44 percent of our
17 residents without a basic public health benefit tool to help prevent
18 dental cavities and oral disease;

19 (3) Providing effective levels of fluoride in public water is a
20 meaningful way to bridge societal inequities that disproportionately
21 affect low-income communities and communities of color. In

1 Washington, third graders from low-income households suffer tooth
2 decay at twice the rate of children from higher-income households.
3 Hispanic, American Indian, and Alaska Native children have a 50
4 percent higher rate of tooth decay than the general population;

5 (4) Oral health inequities affect people at all stages of life
6 and from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Children with dental problems
7 are more likely to miss school and teens with recent dental pain are
8 four times more likely to earn lower grades. Low-income adults are
9 more likely to say the condition of their teeth impacted their
10 ability to interview for a job. Adults missing teeth are less likely
11 to do well in job interviews and seniors without teeth are at risk
12 for malnutrition;

13 (5) Preventing oral health disease through fluoridation is cost-
14 effective for all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. In the United
15 States, dental services are the third highest medical expenditure for
16 families, and the United States centers for disease control and
17 prevention estimate that communities with fluoridated water save an
18 average of \$32 per person per year in prevented dental treatment
19 costs; and

20 (6) The global pandemic will exacerbate the long-term racial and
21 socioeconomic disparities in health care, education, job attainment,
22 job stability, and wage growth, and that implementing effective
23 fluoridation in public water systems is essential to public health
24 and the continued economic vitality of the state of Washington.

25 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 70A.125
26 RCW to read as follows:

27 (1) A public water system that considers discontinuing
28 fluoridation of its water supply on a continuing basis shall seek and
29 receive the most current information about the public health impacts
30 of community water fluoridation from the department and its local
31 health jurisdiction at least 90 days prior to a vote or decision on
32 the matter.

33 (2) After meeting the requirements of receiving information from
34 the department in subsection (1) of this section, a water system that
35 considers discontinuing fluoridation shall notify its customers of
36 its intentions at least 90 days prior to a vote or decision on the
37 matter. Notification to customers must include information received
38 from the department on the public health impacts of discontinuing
39 fluoridation as required in subsection (1) of this section. The water

1 system shall notify its customers via radio, television, newspaper,
2 regular mail, electronic means, or any combination of notification
3 methods which most effectively notifies customers at least 90 days
4 prior to any meeting at which the vote or decision will occur. Any
5 public water system that violates the notification requirements of
6 this subsection shall return the fluoridation of its water supply to
7 its previous optimal level until proper notification is provided
8 under the provisions of this section.

--- **END** ---