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Illinois lawmakers press feds for \$3B in stalled lead pipe replacement funds

Led by U.S. Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, seven members of Congress allege the feds are targeting Democrat-led states.

By Juanpablo Ramirez-Franco | Nov 13, 2025, 5:46pm CST



Chicago is already behind track in replacing lead pipes throughout the city, and withheld federal funds could hurt the efforts even more, lawmakers say. | Anthony Vazquez/Sun-Times

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supply drinking water to homes across the country.

Led by U.S. Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, seven members of Congress allege the feds are targeting Democrat-led states. They warned in a letter sent to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Wednesday that the funding delay is a “dangerous politicization” that puts children and families at risk.

“Federal resources are not partisan tools — they are vital lifelines intended to serve all Americans,” read the letter addressed to EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin. “Using federal funds as leverage against communities based on political considerations represents a dangerous abuse of power that undermines public trust and puts lives at risk.”

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The move comes as communities across the country are grappling with the overwhelming cost of removing the hazardous metal piping from water systems. Illinois is among the states with the most lead service lines.

President Donald Trump’s administration has already withheld congressionally appropriated funding for energy and infrastructure projects from Democrat-led states.

“I think that they’re playing games,” Krishnamoorthi said. “It feels like it’s targeting blue states or blue cities that might require more of this mitigation than other parts of the country.”

including \$15 billion for lead pipe replacements to be disbursed over five years.

But members of the Illinois congressional delegation allege that \$3 billion allotted for lead pipe replacements this year is yet to be seen.

An EPA spokesperson said the agency is “actively working on” the funding.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, which is responsible for disbursing the funds in the state, didn’t say how much money Illinois is missing.

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The Chicago Department of Water Management said it received \$14 million from the state agency for the 2025 financial year and was approved for \$28 million for next year.

“The estimated replacement cost for the Chicago region alone is \$12 billion or more, and statewide, it could be \$14 billion,” Krishnamoorthi said. “Whatever amounts would come to Chicago would not be enough to do the entire job, but the federal component is vital to get the ball rolling.”

Chicago has more than 412,000 lead service lines, the most of any city in the country. So far, the city has replaced roughly 14,000 lead pipes, which has cost more than \$400 million over the last five years.

A single lead pipe replacement has been estimated to cost as much as \$35,000.

“This is impacting people’s health,” said Chakena Sims, a senior policy advocate with Natural Resources Defense Council, a national environmental policy organization.

Lead is toxic and dangerous to human health. The EPA advises that there is no safe level of lead exposure.

Lead plumbing can flake and dissolve into drinking water, which can lead to brain damage, cardiovascular problems and reproductive issues.

“The federal government politicizing access to safe drinking water is an all-time low,” Sims said. “It’s encouraging to see our Illinois congressional leaders stand up for communities.”



Juanpablo Ramirez-Franco

WBEZ • Environment reporter, Grist

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