



CAYUGA COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

Mr. Keith Batman
President

December 20, 2022

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

The Cayuga County Board of Health wishes to express its grave concern that the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has not yet completed their review of proposed changes to the Owasco Watershed Rules and Regulations. The proposed changes were forwarded to the NYSDOH in December 2020. There was a timeline in place to have this resolved by December 2022 that original timeline was delayed and now the NYSDOH timeline is undetermined.

This concern is based upon the rapidly deteriorating water quality of Owasco Lake, the drinking source for over 44,000 Cayuga County residents. The attached chart shows that the level of microcystin in the raw water entering the City of Auburn's water treatment plant has increased exponentially since 2017. Some of the levels seen this past year in 2022 are an order of magnitude greater than the highest seen in 2017. We are worried that if the microcystin levels in the raw water continue to increase, at some point the City of Auburn's treatment plant will be unable to remove all the toxins from the water before it reaches the consumer. Short-term exposure to cyanotoxins in drinking water has been reported to result in gastroenteritis, which may include diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, abdominal pain, and liver and kidney damage in humans.

The disinfection by-product data from public water systems within Cayuga County that utilize water drawn from Owasco Lake, which includes the City of Auburn, the Town of Owasco and 14 purchase systems, is further evidence of the lake's deteriorating water quality. Currently seven of these public water systems are in violation of Subpart 5-1 of the New York State Sanitary Code as their locational running annual average of total trihalomethanes (TTHMs) has exceeded 80 ppm. In addition, six systems had their highest ever TTHM value in the third quarter of 2022, including the City of Auburn. The chart with this information is enclosed. TTHMs, a group of chemicals that includes chloroform, bromoform, bromodichloromethane, and chlorodibromomethane, have been reported to be associated with increased risk for certain types of cancer and low birth weights, miscarriages, and birth defects.

The proposed changes to the Owasco Watershed Rules and Regs that were transmitted to the NYSDOH two years ago were developed over a three year period after cyanotoxins were found



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in the drinking water for the City of Auburn and the Town of Owasco. A thoughtful, transparent, evidence based, and engaged public participation process was undertaken to update and improve the existing Owasco Watershed Rules and Regulations that were promulgated in 1984 in order to protect Owasco Lake as a source of drinking water. The Cayuga County Board of Health is alarmed and outraged that, in spite of the ongoing water quality deterioration, the NYSDOH has failed to act to protect the public health of our residents. The Watershed working group has diligently met its own timelines and obligations and requests the State does so as well. We respectfully ask you, as Governor of New York State, to direct the NYSDOH to complete their review of the proposed draft of the Owasco Watershed Rules and Regulations, so that it can be adopted and the water quality can be better protected from all sources of pollution.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Keith Batman", is written over a faint, larger signature.

Keith Batman
President, Cayuga County Board of Health

Cc: NYS Elected Officials