

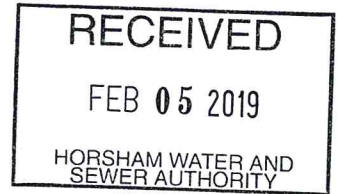
The Intelligencer

Sens. Casey, Menendez write to EPA on chemical concerns

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The Democratic senators joined 20 colleagues in calling for acting EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler to set a formal drinking water standard for PFAS chemicals.

Twenty U.S. senators — one-fifth of that chamber's body — signed onto a letter to acting Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler last week, calling for him to commit to regulating toxic PFAS chemicals in drinking water.

Wheeler faces a key Senate committee hearing this week in his quest to be confirmed officially as EPA administrator, but it's unclear how much the letter will impact that process. Only two of the senators are Republicans, whose party controls the Senate, although Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-West Virginia, is one and could be a deciding vote on the Environment and Public Works Committee. Sen. Thom Tillis, R-North Carolina, is the other.

Pennsylvania Sen. Bob Casey, D-Scranton, also signed the letter. Casey has for years advocated for a more robust federal response to PFAS, which stands for per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances. Contamination of the chemicals has been found in an increasing number of drinking water supplies nationwide, with contamination near military facilities in Bucks and Montgomery counties among the worst. New Jersey Sen. Robert Menendez, D-Jersey City, also signed; New Jersey is one of the states with the highest known rates of PFAS contamination.

The senators' letter was prompted by a report on news website Politico last week that quoted sources saying Wheeler will choose not to regulate PFAS as part of an upcoming EPA action plan.

“If this is accurate, EPA’s inaction would be a major setback to states and affected communities,” the letter read. “Therefore, we urge you to develop enforceable federal drinking water standards.”

The letter conveyed common concerns, chief among them that an absence of federal action leaves states and communities out to dry or struggling to create their own standards.

“This uncoordinated process has led to a patchwork of conflicting drinking water standards and guidelines in nine states,” the letter stated, adding that states should instead be able to “focus their efforts and limited resources on implementation and compliance assurance.”

“We believe it is imperative that the EPA show leadership and help protect American families from these harmful chemicals,” it concluded.

The letter was also signed by senators from Delaware, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington.