



Governor Spencer Cox
350 N. State Street, Suite 200
P.O. Box 142220
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-2220

Dear Governor Cox,

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) writes to express grave concerns regarding House Bill 81 – Fluoride Amendments. Following its recent passage in both the House and Senate, it is no surprise that the bill is drawing national attention. Community water fluoridation is one of the most significant public health advancements of the past 50 years. Rolling back these protections would be a step backward for public health in Utah, particularly harming rural communities. We implore you to not sign this legislation.

NRHA is a non-profit membership organization with more than 21,000 members nationwide that provides leadership on rural health issues. Our membership includes nearly every component of rural America's health care, including rural community hospitals, critical access hospitals, doctors, nurses, and patients. We work to improve rural America's health needs through government advocacy, communications, education, and research.

Community water fluoridation is safe, effective, and critical. Fluoride is a crucial public health tool that has been added to water supplies for decades to help prevent tooth decay. Weakening fluoridation policies would undermine one of the most effective strategies for improving oral health, while also harming Utah's economy particularly in rural communities where access to dental care is limited. Throughout this letter NRHA will outline the benefits of leaving the status quo while highlighting some of the other dental gaps that could be addressed in Utah.

Health Benefits:

Fluoride is a naturally occurring and safe mineral that helps prevent tooth decay. This is essential for maintaining overall health and preventing dental disease in children. Extensive research, including [a review by the U.S. Public Health Service](#), has found no credibility to common misconceptions that there is evidence linking fluoride in drinking water to [cancer](#), [bone decay](#), or [other health disorders](#). By strengthening tooth enamel and preventing decay, fluoridation helps people of all ages maintain better oral health.

Fluoridated water is a scientifically proven method for preventing cavities and promoting better oral health. Studies have shown that fluoridated water reduces tooth decay by [at least 25% in both children and adults](#), even in an era where fluoride toothpaste is widely used. By strengthening tooth enamel and making it more resistant to acid attacks from plaque and sugars, fluoridated water provides continuous, low-level exposure to fluoride, benefiting individuals of all ages regardless of income or access to dental care.

RuralHealth.US

50 F. St., N.W., Suite 520
Washington, DC 20001 | 202-639-0550



Poor oral health leads to millions of lost school and work hours each year, and fluoridation is a simple, equitable solution that benefits entire communities and is already actively working in Utah. In a [report](#) published by the [CareQuest Institute for Oral Health](#) last year, it shows that adults 18 and older in the US lose more than 243 million work or school hours annually due to oral health problems. This loss in productivity time due to untreated oral health disease costs American citizens an [estimated \\$45 billion each year](#). Removing or restricting access to fluoridated water would disproportionately harm rural and low-income populations, who often face greater barriers to dental care. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has [named water fluoridation one of the ten greatest public health achievements of the 20th century](#) due to its proven effectiveness in reducing tooth decay and bridging these gaps.

Given your administration's commitment to preserving public spaces and water, it is important to emphasize that fluoride *is a naturally occurring mineral found in all water sources*, including lakes, rivers, and groundwater. In fact, fluoride is the [13th most abundant mineral in the earth's crust](#).

Economic Repercussions:

Community water fluoridation is a cost-effective strategy that benefits Utah residents by improving oral health and reducing healthcare expenses. While proponents of H.B. 81 argue that fluoridation adds costs upfront, the long-term savings far outweigh the initial investment. Without fluoridation, Utahns especially in rural and low-income families, face higher out-of-pocket dental expenses, increased strain on healthcare providers, and a greater burden on Medicaid resources.

Research shows that fluoridation offers the highest return on investment of any strategy for preventing tooth decay. According to the [CDC](#) every \$1 spent on fluoridation it could save up to \$38 in dental treatment costs. For Utah families, this means fewer expensive dental procedures, reduced pain and suffering, and less time missed from work and school due to dental issues.

Moreover, the savings from [fewer fillings and extractions far exceed the cost of maintaining fluoridated water systems](#). This means less out of pocket costs and less strain on emergency programs around extraction. By not signing this bill you are contributing to saving Utah residents money and keeping healthcare costs lower for everyone while keeping them healthy.

Fluoridation is particularly important for children's health. [Studies indicate](#) that fluoridated water can decrease cavities in children's primary teeth by approximately 35% and in permanent teeth by about 26%. In regard to claims that fluoride harms bone density, fluoridation has little effect on the risk of bone fractures, with [studies indicating a slightly lower fracture risk](#) compared to areas with no fluoridation or excessively high levels. These figures show that community water fluorination is not only good for children but also keeps them in school and reducing the increases of dental emergencies – which in turn helps reduce the cost burden on parents and the [16.7% of children in Utah that are covered by Medicaid/CHIP](#).

By vetoing this bill, you can help save Utah residents money, prevent unnecessary dental procedures, and support a proven public health measure that benefits both children and adults.

RuralHealth.US

50 F. St., N.W., Suite 520
Washington, DC 20001 | 202-639-0550



Comments and Recent Ballot Measures:

Representative Stephanie Gricius, who sponsors for the Bill, noted in [a comment to the Associated Press](#) that she did not dispute the benefits to fluoride, saying that “I don’t dispute that there can be positive benefits from fluoride, which is why the bill also includes a deregulation of the prescription.” Additionally, just as recently as 2023, voters in Brigham City voted down a measure by more than a two-to-one margin that would have removed fluoride from its public water supplies.

It is actions and comments like these that encourage NRHA to work with Utah lawmakers on a more comprehensive bill that protects the health of citizens. Community water fluoridation is safe and effective. H.B. 81 would represent a step backwards in Utah and harm the dental health of Utahns. We strongly encourage you to veto this legislation.

Thank you for your work on behalf of Utahn’s and rural communities. If you or your staff members have questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact NRHA’s State Government Affairs Manager, Zil Joyce Dixon Romero, at zjdromero@ruralhealth.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Morgan", written in a cursive style.

Alan Morgan
Chief Executive Officer
National Rural Health Association