

April 6, 2026

Senator Foug Hawj
Chair, Environment, Climate, and Legacy
Committee
3231 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Senator Steve Green
Ranking Member, Environment, Climate, and
Legacy Committee
2319 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Hawj and Ranking Member Green,

A safe, sufficient, and affordable supply of drinking water is essential for healthy Minnesotans, healthy communities, and a healthy economy. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) is committed to providing safe drinking water to Minnesotans, whether their drinking water comes from a community water system or a private well. We administer the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, which requires drinking water from public water systems meet all standards for nitrate and about 90 other contaminants. However, we know that Minnesota's over 1.2 million private well users do not have the same safeguards to protect against nitrate and other common groundwater contaminants. The Minnesota Well Code plays a key role in helping protect private well water from nitrate contamination, yet about 30% of private wells were constructed prior to the Well Code and lack basic protections.

In response to directives from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2023, we received appropriations from the Minnesota Legislature to help fill this gap in safeguards. MDH works closely with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), the TAP-IN Collaborative (a partnership of soil and water conservation districts, county health departments, and delegated well programs in southeast Minnesota), and the Prairie Island Indian Community to help ensure private well users have drinking water that is safe from elevated nitrate.

This letter highlights efforts and successes in Southeast Minnesota. Legislative appropriations from the Clean Water Fund and the General Fund have made public health intervention efforts in southeast Minnesota possible. Yet, there are three key limitations:

- **In addition to nitrate, other contaminants including arsenic, lead, manganese, and coliform bacteria are serious health threats to families that rely on private wells.** These contaminants are common and can cause short-term and long-term health effects. For example, arsenic is a human carcinogen and is detected in about 50% of private wells across the state (current well testing in southeast Minnesota found elevated nitrate in 7% of participating wells), yet there is no funding to help with mitigating arsenic or the other three common contaminants in private wells.
- **Nitrate contamination in private well water is also an issue in other parts of the state,** but those areas have not received additional funding for focused public health interventions.
- **Funding for household level mitigation is essential to protecting private well user's health, yet there are few and limited funds for mitigation.** Our public health responsibility is to protect people's health now; especially when people who rely on private wells have tested their water and are aware that they have elevated concentrations of contaminants. We acknowledge that prevention for human-caused contamination is another long-term goal. The 2024 legislative appropriation from the General Fund provided groundbreaking funding to provide financial

assistance for mitigation. This funding has been pivotal in engaging private well households and protecting private well users' health.

Thanks to the Legislature's appropriations, partnership with MDA and MPCA, and close collaboration with local partners, we continue to make substantial progress in the current public health intervention to address nitrate in private wells in southeast Minnesota. Key components of the intervention and metrics are listed below. You can view the full work plan and corresponding quarterly reports at: [Well Tested? Well Done SE Minnesota - MN Dept. of Health](#) .

- **Identify all private wells:** Five out of 8 southeast counties are actively identifying all private wells in their jurisdiction and getting them added to the statewide database of wells (County Well Index). We have two additional contracts in progress. At the end of 2025, local partners had identified hundreds of private wells that had not been known before.
- **Provide education and outreach:** Both MDH and local partners conduct education and outreach. Local partners share testing information through many platforms and events, including television ads during the Super Bowl and Olympics. MDH and local partners are working together to send out post cards to private well household at a pace that the lab can manage for well test kit requests. MDH also worked with a marketing firm, which resulted in several videos advertising well testing and ads on Google and Meta. Since February 23, 2026, those ads have generated over 270,000 video views.
- **Offer voluntary testing for all private wells:** MDH aims to offer one free private well test to each of the approximately 36,000 private well households over 10 years. We met 90% of our 2025 target of 3,600 well test kit requests. We have currently met 28% of our goal for 2026, with eight months to go.
- **Offer voluntary remediation for wells that exceed drinking water guidance:** To date, this effort has been led by MDA and the local TAP-IN Collaborative. They have provided reverse osmosis point of use treatment for over 244 private well households with elevated nitrate. This spring, the TAP-IN Collaborative will add well repairs and new well construction as options; this is critical for households where reverse osmosis is not able to remove enough nitrate to make the water safe to drink. Wells repaired and wells constructed according to the Well Code also protect groundwater for future generations.

Sincerely,



Myra Kunas
Assistant Commissioner