
From: Holton, Jennifer (MDARD)
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To: Wurfel, Brad (DEQ)
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Senate Minority Leader Jim Ananich said Tuesday it is "really troubling" that individuals within the Drinking Water Division of the Department of Environmental Quality spent more time protecting their reputation than they did protecting citizens, but he wouldn't go so far as to call for DEQ Director Dan Wyant to resign or be fired.

"I think we need to have a thorough investigation before we make any decisions about who should be fired or anything like that. I think it's clear he sees the gravity of the problem in his department, and I think he's learning that every day," Mr. Ananich told reporters after session. "But we have to get the bottom of how folks in the Drinking Water Division could so blatantly do everything they can in their power to hide the truth from the public, and that's pretty clearly what they did. "

The Flint Journal recently reported that emails exchanged among several DEQ and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials show flags had been raised about lead possibly leaching into Flint's water system some seven months ago.

Mr. Ananich said he's had some preliminary conversations with Senate Majority Leader Arlan Meekhof (R-West Olive) about next steps the Legislature could take to ensure accountability and help the citizens of his hometown regain trust in their water, their elected officials and their government. But Mr. Ananich said the two need to have more formal discussion about a course of action.

Mr. Ananich said he was also in the process of sending a request to the state's auditor general, who happens to be auditing the drinking water division, to add a few questions about the process and procedures in place in the event that a situation like has happened in Flint were to break out.

"When you get an email from somebody on your personal account, four or five people, and none of them have the self-respect for my community to say, 'hmm, maybe I shouldn't do this, maybe I should take this to the next level,' that's a problem," Mr. Ananich said. "That's a cultural problem that people would be more concerned about hiding something than telling the public the truth, and it's really troubling."

He said he felt there ought to be an investigation, though he wasn't immediately sure the form that could take. He hoped it would be independent, he said, and that "if things come out that people were negligent or purposeful in their actions, I think there needs to be some very serious consequences."

He also suggested a possible avenue is through the recently-created Senate Oversight Committee, especially because the House has a committee of the same name too.

"But I think with a department that's got such a heavy responsibility and one division in particular has shown that for the last 18 months they've failed, that warrants our involvement," Mr. Ananich said. "We have to get to the bottom of it. Every day more and more information comes out and it just gets worse."

Sent from my iPhone