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Honorable Chairman of the Committee on Whole, esteemed members of the 35th Legislature, ladies, and gentlemen,

"Do you remember the Flint, Michigan water crisis? The haunting images, the despair, the outrage? Alarming, we in St. Croix are grappling with a similarly grim reality. The parallels are not just striking but deeply unsettling."

I am Maria Friday from Estate Calquohoun, St. Croix, and I stand before you to peel back the layers of the water crisis that is affecting our health, economy, and cherished way of life.

****Residents**** are ensnared in a web of anxiety. Every time they turn on the tap, they are faced with potential harm. Drinking, cooking, washing, bathing, and cleaning – such rudimentary activities now carry the risk of lead-induced cognitive impairments in children and severe health implications for adults.

Our ****livestock**** is suffering silently. With lead hampering their neurological functions and excessive copper causing debilitating gastrointestinal issues, the potential fallout on our island's food chain and self-sustainability is real and concerning. Who will take on the responsibility of having these animals tested?

Our ****Clothing**** is another casualty, deteriorating faster as the tainted water fades fabrics prematurely and weakens their structural integrity.

Our ****bathrooms**** too are bearing the brunt, with visible staining, corrosion, and wear.

Furthermore, the lead is creeping up on us silently. Some of us are on medication due to the high levels of lead/copper. But perhaps, most concerning, is the plight of our ****restaurants****. These establishments, integral to St. Croix's identity and economy, are feeling the strain. The use of contaminated water for cooking, making ice, or serving drinks poses not only significant health risks to patrons but also impacts the quality of their offerings.

The implications are multi-dimensional:

- Skyrocketing operational costs as restaurants resort to purchasing bottled water.
- A shaky trust bond with patrons, invaluable for any business's survival.
- Unforeseen health hazards if any trace of contaminated water infiltrates the food and beverage.
- A genuine threat of closures and subsequent job losses, which would drastically affect our local economy.

Our pleas for mitigation are clear and critical:

- Uninterrupted clean water access for every individual and establishment.
- Immediate distribution of water filter vouchers to address pressing health risks.
- We demand transparency. The root cause of this contamination must be unveiled.
- Financial cover for medical treatments for those adversely affected.
- Consistent testing of the water supply and provide testing to residents who desire

Despite living in the information age, it's shocking and unacceptable that many remain uninformed. Every resident deserves timely updates. St. Croix stands at a pivotal juncture. We urge rapid, comprehensive action to stave off a crisis echoing the tragedy of Flint, Michigan. The urgency is palpable. We must act now. Thank you.