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## **Health starts with plumbing - by Tim Fandel and Andrew DeAngelo**

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As our city and our region continue to undergo an unprecedented building boom, it is a good time to consider how vital top quality plumbing - done by licensed professionals - is to our public health and safety.

Massachusetts has one of the top drinking water ratings in the nation and that is no accident. It is because of our strong plumbing codes, renowned union apprenticeship programs, and a commitment to training and upholding standards set by generations of expert plumbers who built our city.

It seems every day that ground is broken on an exciting, transformative new development: from the 10,000-unit new community underway at Suffolk Downs, to the massive redevelopment at South Station, to the new neighborhood being built over the Massachusetts Tpke. to the recently approved, 21-building, \$5 billion Dorchester Bay City at the former Bayside Expo Center in Dorchester. All these projects require expertise from well-trained union plumbers who will adhere to the codes that ensure the water flowing through these buildings is pure, the outflow systems are sanitary and the heating and cooling systems are professionally installed, tested and maintained for safety.

Making sure that licensed plumbers are on these jobs is crucial, as corner cutting in our industry can prove costly, or even fatal. We cannot allow shortcuts that compromise safety in Massachusetts.

Unlicensed plumbing can result in shoddy, incomplete or sub-standard work which can lead to water damage, mold, water contamination, dangerous temperature volatility or even disease. If plumbing is not installed correctly and not protected, buildings are susceptible to increased risk of bacterial environments or worse. Properly installed and carefully designed water drainage systems are essential to public health.

The first thing an insurance company will do in the event of an accident, a leak, a bacterial outbreak or other public health or safety crisis will be to check to see if the system was installed by a licensed plumber. If the answer to that question is no, then developers, contractors, building owners and others can be held liable.

There is a high cost of cutting corners and with the level of investment underway in our region, it simply makes no sense to inject risk into any project when there are so many experienced, licensed plumbers at the ready.

Licensed, union plumbers are constantly refreshing their training to ensure their craftsmanship meets the current standards under state law. Codes are constantly changing and new heating and cooling technologies are evolving daily. It takes committed professionals to stay up-to-date on these technologies and make sure nothing is left to chance.

We have seen disasters and public health emergencies in other states – a Legionnaire's disease outbreak in Hampton Beach, N.H. that led to lawsuits; water quality issues in Indiana, Mississippi and Michigan; and high lead levels in drinking water in New York, among other systemic failings.

There have been efforts to relax the plumbing code in Massachusetts, but thankfully, our legislators have stood strong to protect the code that keeps our drinking water clean and our communities safe and sanitary.

The motto of Boston's Plumbers and Gasfitters Local 12, which has proudly represented licensed professional plumbers since 1889, is, simply, "health starts with plumbing." The national United Association, of which Local 12 is a member, represents more than 375,000 plumbing industry professionals in 300 locals across the U.S. and Canada, making it one of the largest and longest-standing labor unions in the country. Our signatory contractor group is comprised of 65 plumbing businesses that perform a multitude of work on Boston's largest construction projects all the way down to replacing a hot water heater in your neighbor's home.

Our members and signatory contractors live by this simple message every day - that health starts with plumbing. It is a message that is more important than ever to consider as our city grows. We sometimes take clean drinking water and sanitary plumbing for granted, but in many nations, and even other states, it is not a given.

Protecting public health must remain priority number one as we continue to revitalize and reimagine our city and our state. These historic investments transforming our communities are too important to

leave to chance.

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