



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

From: Patricia Rubert-Nason, Sierra Club Maine

Date: January 20, 2022

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 1875 - An Act To Address Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Pollution from State-owned Solid Waste Disposal Facilities

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and Members of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Patricia Rubert-Nason, and I write on behalf of Sierra Club and the over 20,000 members and supporters in Maine. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nationwide as we defend everyone's right to a healthy world. In support of that mission, we strongly support LD 1875 and urge you to vote "ought-to-pass."

PFAS are a class of chemicals that contain strong carbon-fluorine bonds that keep them from degrading, leading them to accumulate in the environment over time. They also bind to blood proteins, so they tend to accumulate within human and animal bodies, rather than being eliminated.¹

According to the FDA:

The widespread use of PFAS and their ability to remain intact in the environment means that over time PFAS levels from past and current uses can result in increasing levels of contamination of groundwater and soil. This same accumulation also can occur in humans and animals, with PFAS found in the blood of humans and animals worldwide.²

PFAS chemicals not only accumulate in the environment, they negatively impact human health. The National Institute of Health and Environmental Sciences³ has documented links between human exposures to PFAS and adverse health outcomes including altered metabolism, decreased fertility, reduced fetal growth, increased risk of being overweight or obese and reduced ability of the immune system to fight infections.

¹ <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/curated-collections/pfas>

²

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/statement-fdas-scientific-work-understand-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas-food-and-findings>

³ <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/pfc/index.cfm>

Maine is seeing widespread impacts of PFAS contamination of our land and waters. In recent years at least 3 Maine farms have had to stop selling milk and/or beef due to PFAS contamination⁴ including one farm with shockingly high levels of PFAS documented in their milk, a Fort Fairfield dairy farm with PFAS levels over 150 times the allowable level.⁵

PFAS contamination is not limited to farms. At least 191 wells and water sources have so far been identified as contaminated by PFAS;⁵ a ‘do not eat’ advisory has been issued for deer harvested in the Fort Fairfield area;⁶ and the DEP (and other agencies) are investigating over 700 sites for potential PFAS contamination.⁵ Clearly, we have a problem with PFAS contamination in Maine.

One source of PFAS in our environment is landfill leachate. One recent study found that 92% of landfill leachate contains PFAS and that the average levels were ten times higher than in the other wastewater flowing into wastewater treatment plants. PFAS is not readily broken down by biotic treatment, and is likely to remain in the treated water (and released to our rivers and streams) and/or the sludge (with the potential to contaminate land, if spread). LD 1875 would address this problem by requiring treatment “to reduce the concentration of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances to the extent feasible with available technology;” or equivalent treatment at the wastewater treatment plant.

As a mother, I worry about my children’s futures. PFAS are commonly known as “forever chemicals” for a reason. Their breakdown rate in the environment is negligible. As long as we continue to produce them and release them they will continue to accumulate at ever-higher levels and present increasing health risks. I worry that if we don’t address this issue now my children and their children, on into the future, will find clean water and healthy soils to grow food for their families scarce or unavailable.

We didn’t always understand the risk that persistent chemicals such as PFAS posed. But now we do. Continuing to discharge PFAS contaminated leachate to municipal wastewater treatment plants which are not equipped to treat it compounds our existing contamination problem. We urge the committee to vote “ought-to-pass” on LD 1875.

Sincerely,
Patricia Rubert-Nason
Sierra Club Maine Volunteer

⁴ <https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ag/pfas/index.shtml>

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<https://www.mainepublic.org/health/2021-10-22/maine-dep-identifies-34-towns-with-high-priority-sites-pfas-chemicals-testing>

⁶ <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/hunting-trapping/hunting-resources/deer/index.html>