



To: Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

From: Alice Elliot, Sierra Club Maine

Re: LD 1923 "An Act To Define as a Hazardous Substance under Maine Law Any Substance Defined under Federal Law as a Hazardous Substance, Pollutant or Contaminant"

Date: January 24, 2020

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Senator Carson, Representative Tucker, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

My name is Alice Elliot and I am here today as Maine Chapter Director of the Sierra Club. The Maine Chapter has over 6,000 active members and over 20,000 other supporters spread across every district in the State of Maine. On behalf of all those people, I am pleased to testify in favor of LD 1923.

As one of the largest and oldest environmental organizations in the country, the Sierra Club has long been an advocate for ensuring a clean and safe environment. Protecting our citizens and natural resources from poisoning and the other ill effects of toxic chemicals is surely one of the most important responsibilities of our government.

But right now, our government's ability to protect us is hampered by concerns that certain chemicals are not properly classified as hazardous under Maine law.

LD 1923 will protect the public by allowing the DEP to add new chemicals to the hazardous classification. The chemicals most at issue are PFAS — per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. PFAS are widely used fluorinated chemicals which are highly persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic to people and animals. PFAS are linked to decreased effectiveness of childhood vaccines, liver and kidney damage, increased risk of thyroid disease, increased risk of asthma, decreased fertility, pregnancy complications, lower birth weights, and cancer.

PFAS are used in certain manufacturing processes, fire-fighting training activities at airports and military bases, and in some food packaging. Nationwide, an estimated 15 million people have been exposed to PFAS. Indeed, PFAS pollution is now global, with contamination documented in the people and animals of the remote Arctic.

Classifying PFAS as hazardous will allow the state to focus resources on cleaning up the fields, farms and water around Maine now contaminated with this class of chemicals. Once LD 1923 is enacted, the DEP can begin using resources from the Uncontrolled Sites Program to address PFAS contamination.

Each day on average 37 babies are born in Maine. Within a few years they will be walking through Maine fields, splashing in Maine streams, and working on Maine farms. When that time comes, will they be exposed to toxic chemicals that increase their risk of cancer, interfere with their immune system, and result in liver damage? The answer must be “no.”

Please vote yes on LD 1923 so that the DEP can use its resources to help protect our people and environment from these “forever chemicals.”