

Testimony of Gail L. Carlson, Ph.D.

In Support of LD 1488 *An Act to Expand Testing for Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances to Private Drinking Water Wells*

Before the Committee on Health and Human Services
Maine Legislature, Augusta, ME
April 28, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee, thank you for reading my testimony. My name is Gail Carlson, and I live in Waterville. I hold a Ph.D. in biochemistry, I teach public health courses at Colby College, and I conduct research on local PFAS contamination in surface water, groundwater, snow and soil. I wish I could deliver this testimony in person, but at the very time of this public hearing, I am teaching my course *Pollution and Human Health*, so I am submitting written testimony instead.

I am testifying in **support** of LD 1488 because, regrettably, PFAS contamination is extremely widespread in Maine, and PFAS are highly persistent and mobile in the environment, leading to a significant long-term risk of exposure via the consumption of drinking water. We must do everything we can to protect Mainers from exposure to these harmful chemicals. Those least likely to have the knowledge, means or power to test their water include renters using a private well, so requiring landlords to test well water for PFAS makes abundant public health sense and is the right thing to do.

It is important to think of PFAS not as a highly localized pollution problem affecting only a few, but rather a widespread one. Contaminated sludge spreading in my area led to destruction of farms and wells in nearby Fairfield and Unity, but PFAS is also running off into waterways and spreading widely in the environment, including impacting Waterville's surface water (Messalonskee Stream and Kennebec River) and China Lake, the source of Waterville's drinking water. Also, PFAS are such common components of consumer products and industrial processes that other routes of environmental contamination are likely. All sources of contamination pose a threat to human health because PFAS build up readily in the tissues of humans, animals and plants, and are linked to many extremely serious [adverse health impacts](#), including several forms of cancer, immunosuppression, metabolic disorders and birth defects. People need to know if their drinking water has been affected by this major hazard.

The seriousness of PFAS harm cannot be overstated. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently proposed [legally-binding limits](#) on five PFAS in drinking water, each at or below 10 parts per trillion (ppt). These are very low levels and signal the gravity of PFAS health effects. In fact, for two of the most common PFAS, EPA proposed health advisories (non-binding standards based solely on the latest research on human health impacts) in the low *parts per quadrillion* range. This is so low as to be nearly unheard of in drinking water regulation.

For one of the new binding standards, Waterville's public drinking water will be in violation and the supplier will have to take action. And these standards apply only to *public* water systems. There is no equivalent protection for private well users, which is all the more reason that universal well water testing is needed, so that people find out what's in their water and can take steps to filter their water if need be. Another provision of this bill would require that the state include PFAS in its uniform list of contaminants to be tested in private well water, which I support because it will have a beneficial impact on public health as testing increases.

Please vote *ought to pass* on LD 1488. Thank you.