

February 26, 2025

Testimony in support of LD 400 and LD 222

Judith Graber, PhD, MS.

Hallowell, Maine

My name is Judith Graber, I am an Associate Professor of Epidemiology at Rutgers the State University of NJ. My area of expertise is environmental and occupational health. I am a nationally and internationally recognized expert in firefighter health and have published multiple papers in academic journals on PFAS and related health concerns in firefighters and in US communities with PFAS-contaminated water. I am also a long-time resident of Hallowell Maine and a former employee of Maine CDC.

The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that almost half of U.S. tap water contains PFAS. Aqueous Film-Forming Foam (AFFF) use at military based and airports is one of the largest sources of PFAS contamination in drinking water. In Maine, we know about biosolid spreading as an important source of PFAS contamination, but the massive spill at the Brunswick Naval Air Station reminded us that AFFF is also an import source of drinking water contamination that must be addressed.

PFAS are of environmental concern because once in the environment, including our drinking water, they stay there for a very long time unless removed. They are a public health and health concern because of the numerous adverse health effects associated with the most studied PFAS including increased cholesterol levels in blood, decreased response to vaccines, adverse birth and pregnancy outcomes, increases in thyroid and liver disease, and increased risk for some cancers.

I am here to speak in strong support of the bills that are designed to help Maine fire departments move away from using AFFF and toward effective replacements. As a public health researcher and practitioner, I know that the key to protecting workers and communities is understanding the hazard so it can be removed or contained. LD 400 and LD 222 do this by calling for the Office of the State Fire Marshall to initiate programs that inventory AFFF being stored in the State and develop take-back program. This allows the needed time for planning for the Fire Marshalls office to work with other State agencies to develop, guide, and implement these programs.

However, this important work of inventorying and replacing AFFF will be a burden of time and resources for the State Fire Marshall Office and our over 400 Maine fire departments, the vast majority of which – about 90% - are all or mostly all staffed by volunteers. As such I urge the legislature to not only pass these bills but do so with adequate fiscal support.