



STATE OF MAINE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SPEAKER'S OFFICE
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1315

William D. Pluecker

State Representative
1133 Finntown Road
Warren, ME 04864
(207) 273-3044
Bill.Pluecker@legislature.maine.gov

Senator Ingwerseni, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Sen. Bill Pluecker and I represent District 44, Hope, Warren, and Union. I'm here to present L.D. 1006 An Act to Ensure Access to Safe Drinking Water from Household Wells in Rural Areas by Expanding Testing, of which I am a cosponsor.

We've all heard the stories—families across Maine discovering that their drinking water is contaminated with PFAS. These compounds, used in everything from nonstick cookware to firefighting foam, are now found in our soil, our water, and unfortunately, our bodies. The health risks are well known: PFAS exposure has been linked to serious conditions including cancer, liver damage, immune system suppression, and developmental issues in children.

Over the past few years, this committee has reviewed several bills aimed at addressing PFAS contamination. We've come a long way in understanding the scope of this crisis. Contaminated sludge spread on farmland has been a major source, but it's not the only one. PFAS can leach from landfills, enter groundwater through industrial discharge, and spread via firefighting foam used in training exercises. These chemicals are highly mobile and incredibly persistent, making them particularly difficult to contain or eliminate.

While public water systems in Maine are starting to test and treat for PFAS, more than half of Maine residents rely on private wells for their drinking water—and those systems are often overlooked. Unfortunately, the cost of testing for PFAS in well water is steep: around \$250 to \$300 for a certified test. For low-income families, this cost is a significant barrier, leaving them vulnerable to unknowingly drinking contaminated water.

Maine already has a program that helps cover the cost of water testing for contaminants like arsenic for low-income households. LD 500 seeks to make a simple but critical change: add PFAS to the list of covered contaminants. This bill doesn't reinvent the wheel—it builds on existing infrastructure to provide vital assistance to those who need it most.

LD 500 will utilize funding from the state's Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory dedicated account to help pay for the cost of this testing. This fund receives the fees paid to the state lab for various tests, including water testing. Utilizing this funding to help low income people get their water tested is a natural connection. Looking at the OSR account within DHHS, 01410A014304 "Public Health Laboratory" the unobligated FY balances going back the last five years starting in 2023 are as follows:
2023: \$2,696,287; 2022: \$1,670,266; 2021: \$684,482; 2020: \$907,707 and 2019: \$512,706.

Based on the fiscal note from the bill last session, which averages around \$165,000 a year, it appears that there is enough funding in this account to cover the cost of the testing. I have not seen updated numbers for 2024 but am happy to work with the Department if something has changed within that account to look at other possible funding sources outside the general fund.

No family should be left in the dark about what's in their water. LD 500 is a common-sense solution to a serious public health issue. Let's ensure all Mainers have access to safe, clean drinking water—regardless of income. Now is the time to act.