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Testimony in favor of LD 1870 from Sydney R. Sewall, MD (Hallowell)

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

I am writing as a representative of **PSR Maine**, an organization of hundreds of physicians, nurses, and other health professionals concerned about environmental factors that affect health. In addition to the cost of property damage and lost productivity related to severe storms and floods, the environmental damage caused by our longstanding dependence on fossil fuels also has adverse consequences for the health of Maine residents.

We all recognize the increasing prevalence of vector-borne diseases. When I began working as a pediatrician in the central Maine region in 1982, **Lyme disease** was a rarity and mostly located south of Portland and east of the interstate. Now it's a regular occurrence. My grandson went to summer camp here for a few weeks in 2023 and ended up with Lyme arthritis a few months later.

The warming climate increases the prevalence of clinical **heat illness** during periods of exertion on those more common HOT days we're seeing in the summer months. Most of these episodes will respond to rest, hydration and aggressive cooling – but if not recognized, heat stroke can result in ER visits, hospitalization or worse.

Hotter days tend to impair **air quality** by interacting with exhaust fumes and generating more ozone. This is in addition to the particulate matter we end up breathing from wildfires. While we have avoided major forest fires in our state, we do get the smoke from other states and Canada. Increased **asthma, cardiovascular disease, prematurity** et. Al are all associated with air pollution. Asthma and **allergies**, in addition, are exacerbated by the more intense and prolonged pollen seasons. In addition to floods and runoff damage, intense rainfall can overwhelm water treatment facilities polluting our rivers and estuaries, with the potential of leading to food-borne infections. Housing leaks may generate mold infestations in homes.

A proportion of the burden we face from accidental injuries is related to climate change generated severe events. A recent study in **Pediatrics** examined public records across the US – finding that floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, extreme heat/cold have generated thousands of preventable deaths in children over the past two decades. The mental health effects of experiencing trauma, even without personal physical injury, can be as profound.

In summary, the costs generated by our centuries-old fossil fuel habit go beyond the huge price paid for housing and infrastructure repair. Public health is also affected by multiple routes. We know who's responsible, and who's profited. It's time to get them to pay up...

Sincerely,

Sydney R. Sewall, MD MPH
Instructor in Pediatrics, MDFMR