

March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Testimony from Christina Heiniger, resident of Trenton, Maine and spokesperson for PFAS Free Trenton on **LD 132 - An Act to Require Health Insurance Carriers to Provide Coverage for Blood Testing for Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances**  
Sponsored by Senator Stacy Brenner

My name is Christina Heiniger and I live in Trenton, Maine.

In preparing this testimony, I was a bit overwhelmed- where to start? This pfas crisis brings up so many societal issues (our very broken healthcare and health insurance system, the dysfunction of our consumer culture and how we deal with our solid waste and sewage, the fact that the EPA and Maine DEP turned a blind eye to these chemicals for decades...), and this bill is just a drop in the bucket. But many drops can fill the bucket with solutions that work and we need to work together on this. In case you live under a rock and haven't heard about pfas...

- Toxic per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) or "forever chemicals" are used in thousands of everyday products and manufacturing processes. PFAS accumulate in our wastewater and can contaminate the land and groundwater when sludge is applied to farmland.

For over two years, I have been involved with a few other residents in Trenton working to address the pfas issue in our town. We created a group called Pfas Free Trenton. **Pfas Free Trenton (PFT)** is a group of Trenton residents who want to ensure clean PFAS-free water in our town now and for future generations. Before I talk about that, I want to say that my heart goes out to the folks in Fairfield, Thorndike and all the other communities in our State that have been severely contaminated with pfas chemicals through the spreading of sludge on agricultural fields.

Through no fault of their own, following practices and guidelines endorsed by the Dept of Environmental Protection, these people are now having to deal with the harsh reality that they have been poisoned, perhaps for decades, by these chemicals linked to low birthweight, cholesterol issues, kidney cancer, decreased immune  
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response, breast cancer, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, elevated liver enzymes, testicular cancer, thyroid dysfunction, and ulcerative colitis. These chemicals are called “Forever chemicals” because they are difficult to detox (at best) and they don’t break down. They can linger in people’s bodies for decades. These Mainer’s livelihoods, health and peace of mind have been severely affected by this. Is it too much to ask that they can count on having a basic blood test paid for by their health insurance to monitor these chemicals in their bodies and help them make health choices and get treatments they may need down the road?! \$450 - \$600 for this test is a lot to come up with when your farm has been ruined and your livelihood taken away.

- **Treatment for PFAS exposure is centered around assessing the patient’s level of exposure.** High level exposure triggers regular screening to allow for early detection of linked diseases. There is no approved procedure to remove the chemicals from an exposed person’s body, and the chemicals linger in the blood and organs for decades. The assessment of personal exposure can help impacted families understand the risks and prevent additional future exposure. (source: Defend Our Health)

That being said pfas are being found all over our State. Where I live in Trenton- between Bar Harbor and Ellsworth- the levels of 6 types of pfas in the Trenton Elementary School’s water measured at 33.9 ppt in 2017. This wasn’t remediated until 2021, when the new legislation here in Maine was passed creating interim standards for pfas in drinking water of 20 ppt for 6 types of PFAS. This means the Pre-K through grade 8 students there were drinking contaminated water for years... we don’t really know how long, but we do know there was a gap of about 4 years between finding these chemicals and the school addressing the problem.

Since then, Pfas Free Trenton has worked with the Town of Trenton and residents to offer free testing for pfas. We found (so far, but data is still coming in) of those 79 tests we have results for, 2 wells tested over the State of Maine “safe levels” of 20 ppt for a combined 6 types of PFAS. One tested at 21ppt and another tested at 38ppt. Another

11 wells tested with some detectable levels of PFAS. These ranged from 2.06 ppt to 16.2 ppt. Thus, 13 wells total so far have show some PFAS contamination. That means 2.5% of the wells tested so far were over 20ppt. 16.5% of the wells tested showed PFAS contamination of any kind. Meanwhile, over on Mt.Desert Island, MDI High School found that their water is also contaminated with pfas. As a matter fo fact, Mount Desert Island High School, Brooklin Elementary School and Deer Isle-Stonington High School all had water test results showing PFAS chemicals much higher than the state of Maine drinking water standard of 20 parts per trillion. MDIHS had results of 85 parts per trillion. (Source: Mt Desert Islander, July 20, 2022).

- At least **25 Maine schools** and daycare facilities have water supplies above Maine's interim drinking water standard of 20 parts per trillion, suggesting that **6,650 children and young adults** currently enrolled at those schools have been exposed to high levels of PFAS while at school. There are **43 impacted schools** and a total of **9550 children** exposed above EPA's draft drinking water standards, which are lower than Maine's regulation. Maine DHHS is awaiting data on an additional 99 schools, and the number of exposed students is likely much higher. The total number of previously exposed alumni from these impacted schools would be hard to calculate. (source: Defend Our Health)

I believe any parent in this State who knows their children were exposed to pfas on a regular basis has a right to have that blood test paid for by their health insurance. Imagine a family with two or 3 children at one of these schools. 3 children at \$600/test = \$1800. We all know what it's like out there economically right now. Mainers are reeling from the hit of Covid and massive inflation on groceries, rents and electricity (to name a few... my electric bill went up 35% last year). It's crucial that health insurances cover this test, because the reality is that many of us just cannot afford to pay out of pocket for medical expenses like this.

Lastly, Greg Askins, a physician who is a member fo PFAS Free Trenton, asked me to share this from an article In the public health section of Oct/Nov/Dec 2022 issue of the quarterly newsletter from

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the Maine Medical Association. This is what doctors in Maine are being advised to recommend regarding serum testing for pfas:

“In July 2022, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) produced a report reviewing current evidence of health outcomes associated with PFAS and setting new standards for who to test for PFAS, when to discuss exposure reduction, and how to monitor those exposed.

#### Serum testing for PFAS

...The NASEM report recommends testing individuals who are “likely to have a history of elevated exposure.” This includes individuals working with fluorochemicals, firefighters, or military personnel; those living in an area with elevated PFAS water levels; those consuming fish or game from an area with elevated PFAS levels; or those living in an area where PFAS contamination may have occurred, including near “facilities that use or have used fluorochemicals, commercial airports, military bases, wastewater treatment plants, farms where sewage sludge may have been used, or landfills or incinerators that have received PFAS-containing waste.” While MaineCare covers the cost of PFAS serum testing, not all insurances do, and for those paying out of pocket the cost is close to \$600.”

If doctors are recommending this testing to their patients, then Health insurances should pay for it. The burden of this pfas crisis should not be borne by the public, from whom these chemicals were hidden for decades, with no government regulation.

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