



Solutions for a  
Toxic-Free Tomorrow

Testimony of Sarah Woodbury, Director of Advocacy, Defend Our Health  
In Support of LD 132, "An Act to Require Health Insurance Carriers to Provide Coverage for  
Blood Testing for Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances"  
Before the Joint Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services  
March 28, 2023

Good Afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the Joint Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services. My name is Sarah Woodbury. I am the director of advocacy for Defend Our Health. Defend Our Health's mission is to make sure that everyone has equal access to safe food and drinking water, healthy homes, and products that are toxic-free and climate friendly. I am here to testify in support of LD 132, "An Act to Require Health Insurance Carriers to Provide Coverage for Blood Testing for Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances". PFAS contamination is a serious issue in Maine and those affected must have access to testing so they can work with their health care provider to mitigate its impacts.

What are PFAS? Per and poly fluorolalkyl substances or PFAS are a class of man-made toxic "forever chemicals" that are in every day products including food packaging, cookware, cosmetics, outerwear, and even dental floss. Depending on who you talk to, there are anywhere from 9,000 to 12,000 PFAS. PFAS are highly mobile and take a long time to break down in our bodies and in the environment. Hence the nickname "forever chemicals".

Maine is currently in the midst of a PFAS contamination crisis. You have all heard the stories of impacted farmers and well owners across the state. Both the Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry recently testified in front of ENR and ACF and stated that there are currently over 50 contaminated farms and over 300 contaminated wells. These numbers will continue to grow as the state does more testing of farmland. And these numbers don't include contamination from sources other than land application of sludge such as contamination from firefighting foam.

PFAS have been around for decades but it's just in the past several years that we've really started to get a handle on the health impacts of these toxic chemicals. And the health impacts are startling. The CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease registry lists some of the health impacts as increased cholesterol level, decreased vaccine response in children, increased risk of high blood pressure or pre-eclampsia in pregnant women, and increases in testicular and kidney cancer<sup>1</sup>. A study by Dr. Phillippe Grandjean from Harvard University talks

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, November 1). *Potential health effects of Pfas Chemicals*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved March 26, 2023, from <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/health-effects/index.html>

about the immunotoxicity from PFAS exposure and that environmental health research over the past ten years has “revealed important human health risks, e.g., to the immune system”.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, a recent study from Mount Sinai shows that exposure to PFAS leads to reduced fertility for women.<sup>3</sup> These health impacts are not just dangerous for adults but for children as well. The American Academy of Pediatrics released clinical guidance to help reduce exposure due to health impacts such as high cholesterol and low birth weight.<sup>4</sup>

These health impacts have led the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine to release a report that calls for testing for those with elevated PFAS exposure. The report finds “evidence of association between PFAS exposure and increased risk of decreased antibody response, dyslipidemia (abnormally high cholesterol), decreased infant and fetal growth, and increased risk of kidney cancer. Intended to inform CDC clinical guidance, the report says if testing reveals PFAS levels associated with an increased risk of adverse effects, patients should receive regular screenings and monitoring for these and other health impacts”.<sup>5</sup>

While the health impacts of PFAS are serious, they can be mitigated by early detection and monitoring by a health care professional. Much like a mammogram or other preventative healthcare measures, access to PFAS blood serum testing will provide PFAS impacted Mainers and their doctors with the necessary information to help them to set up monitoring, and if necessary, treatment plans. Prevention is the best medicine. But much like other preventative care, these tests aren’t cheap. The cost for a test can run from \$450-600 dollars, a not insignificant cost for many in our communities. Insurance companies should be required to pay for these costs to help Mainers monitor their health and give their doctors vital information. The burden of this cost should not land on the shoulders of our farmers, firefighters, and other PFAS impacted individuals. Therefore, we at Defend urge the committee to unanimously vote “ought to pass” on LD 132. Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> Grandjean, P. (2018, July 31). *Delayed discovery, dissemination, and decisions on intervention in environmental health: A case study on immunotoxicity of perfluorinated alkylate substances - environmental health*. BioMed Central. Retrieved March 26, 2023, from <https://ehjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12940-018-0405-y>

<sup>3</sup> Mount Sinai Health System. (2023, March 17). *Exposure to chemicals found in everyday products is linked to significantly reduced fertility*. Mount Sinai Health System. Retrieved March 26, 2023, from <https://www.mountsinai.org/about/newsroom/2023/exposure-to-chemicals-found-in-everyday-products-is-linked-to-significantly-reduced-fertility>

<sup>4</sup> *Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)*. American Academy of Pediatrics. (2023, February 2). Retrieved March 26, 2023, from <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/environmental-health/promoting-healthy-environments-for-children/perfluoroalkyl-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances/>

<sup>5</sup> Nationalacademies.org. (2022, July 28). *New Report Calls for Expanded PFAS Testing for People With History of Elevated Exposure, Offers Advice for Clinical Treatment*. National Academies of Science Engineering Medicine. Retrieved March 26, 2023, from <https://www.nationalacademies.org/news/2022/07/new-report-calls-for-expanded-pfas-testing-for-people-with-history-of-elevated-exposure-offers-advice-for-clinical-treatment>