

Testimony regarding LD 1006 An Act to Ensure Access to Healthy Drinking Water from Household Wells in Rural Maine

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My Name is Christina Heiniger and I am a Trenton Maine resident and member of PFAS Free Trenton. Please accept this testimony in support of LD 1006.

A significant number of wells in Trenton have been contaminated with pfas. In 2017, our Trenton Elementary School's water measured at 33.9 ppt for 6 types of pfas. This wasn't remediated until 2021, when new legislation here in Maine was passed creating interim standards for pfas in drinking water of 20 ppt for 6 types of PFAS.

Pfas Free Trenton worked with the Town of Trenton to offer residents free well water testing for pfas using ARPA funds. We feel strongly that community-wide free testing is important because our school well is contaminated. We want to determine the causes and extent of pfas contamination in our community and reduce exposure to these chemicals in our town.

Water testing for pfas is expensive- costing \$250 to \$300 or more per test. This puts testing out of financial reach for many low income households and the cost is a major disincentive even for households who might afford it.

We were only able to get funding from the Town for 100 free tests- 9% of Trenton households. It took us at Pfas Free Trenton over a year to find a way to offer these 100 free tests. We could not get free testing for our whole community through the Maine DEP. The State *does* offer some free testing in other communities where there was large scale use of sludge in agriculture, prioritizing free testing in those cities and towns. However, the Maine DEP is behind their own schedule with that testing.

Despite the fact that there has been no large scale agricultural spreading of sludge in Trenton, we have found pfas *are* an issue in our town.

We found: of 96 tests we have results for, 16 wells (16.7%) were contaminated with pfas. 2 wells tested over the State of Maine interim "safe levels" of 20 ppt for a combined 6 types of PFAS. (In addition, the school tested at 33.9ppt in 2017 as previously mentioned). Another 14 wells tested with some detectable levels of PFAS- from 2.06 ppt to 16.2 ppt. While these 14 wells tested below the interim State of Maine standards for pfas in drinking water, many of them were ABOVE the new federal guidelines for pfas in drinking water. The Federal guidelines are much lower than Maine standards.

There are still about 1000 untested households in Trenton. Based on our testing results we can estimate at least 10% of these are contaminated as well. That means about 100 families in Trenton alone are possibly drinking contaminated water without knowing it.

In our area, Mt. Desert Island High School, Brooklin Elementary School and Deer Isle-Stonington High School also had water test results showing PFAS chemicals much higher than the State of Maine drinking water standard. The source of pfas in all these cases is as yet **undetermined**. (Source: Mt Desert Islander, July 20, 2022). Indeed, pfas contaminated school wells are rarely located anywhere near documented sludge spreading sites.

As our experience in Trenton shows, Pfas can get into drinking water from many sources. Contaminated sludge has been sold to landscapers and home gardeners as sludge-based compost. Until a year ago, you could buy this at any gardening center in bags. These bags might be labeled “bio solids”, but many people did not know what this labeling meant. This material needed no DEP application license. The State has no record of locations where drinking water wells might be at risk of contamination from sludge-based compost.

Pfas can also enter the water supply through fire fighting foam, pump out facilities in campgrounds, damaged septic tanks, illegal dumping in backyards, leach from landfills and contaminated fill for new construction. The Maine DEP is only scratching the surface by prioritizing communities with widespread agricultural sludge spreading.

Thus I urge you to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 1006 to make widescale free water testing for pfas available to all Mainers who are at risk of drinking well water contaminated with pfas from many possible causes.