



Solutions for a
Toxic-Free Tomorrow

Testimony of Sarah Woodbury, Vice President of Programs and Policy, Defend Our Health
NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 2214, "An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and
Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to
Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government
for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025"
Before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee
March 4, 2024

Good Morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee. My name is Sarah Woodbury. I am the Vice President for Programs and Policy for Defend Our Health. Defend Our Health works to make sure everyone has equal access to safe food, safe drinking water, healthy homes and toxic-free, climate-friendly products. I am here to testify in neither for nor against LD 2214, "An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025".

We recognize that there are a lot of important and valuable programs all competing for the same small pot of money and that the Governor and members of this committee need to make hard choices and try to do what is best for the people of Maine. However, we were disappointed to see that there is no money set aside in the Governor's current supplemental budget to continue to address the issue of PFAS contamination across the state. We do appreciate the funds that have been designated over the past few years to help with cleanup and remediation. We are particularly grateful for the \$60M that the Governor set aside last year to help those farmers that have been impacted by PFAS contamination to help them with things such as income replacement and well water remediation. The \$60M is important but it will not be enough to cover all the costs associated with PFAS contamination.

Farmers are not the only ones impacted by PFAS contamination. We have been working for some time to try to get funding for Mainers with residential wells that cannot afford to test those wells for PFAS and other contaminants. In fact, there is a bill before this committee that will do just that, and we hope you will consider funding this important legislation. We would have liked to have seen funding set aside for residential well testing in the supplemental budget. Not for just PFAS but for all contaminants. Safe drinking water is a basic human right and the state should be doing all it can to make sure that everyone has access to safe drinking water.

Finally, once again we would like to bring up the issue of staffing in the state agencies. We know that the staff at the DEP, and all agencies for that matter, work hard to implement the policies that are passed by the legislature. Unfortunately, many staff are overworked and the Department is not provided with additional staffing that is necessary to do the work put in front of them. We have passed several groundbreaking pieces of legislation in the past few years, the Kids Safe Products Act, Extended Producer Responsibility, and the PFAS Products Ban just to



name a few. All of these are important and necessary for the health and environment of our state. But the staffing levels at the agency do not meet the needs of these programs. While we recognize that the supplemental budget is not necessarily the time to make large staffing investments, several of the members of this committee will be back next year and we urge you, and the Governor for that matter, to start thinking sooner rather than later about providing the DEP and other departments with the staffing necessary to do the work. The state is the 2nd largest employer for the state of Maine. 1 in 5 positions are open at the state agencies. I have had conversations with staff in the DEP and in other agencies about both the difficulty in keeping staff and the difficulty in hiring for new positions. While not the only reasons, issues cited are both workload and salary. Maine is the oldest state in the nation. We need to attract and keep young people here in the state if we are to be successful. We cannot attract and keep young workers if we don't provide a decent work life balance or competitive benefits and salaries. We must do right by our state employees.

Thank you for your time.