

10:00 am 216 Burton Cross

Testimony in Support of LD 400 and LD 222

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South Portland Fire-EMS

Chairpersons and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 400 and LD 222. As a fire service leader, I have seen firsthand the challenges associated with PFAS-containing firefighting foam. These hazardous substances, once essential for emergency response, now pose significant health and environmental risks. Today, I urge you to support these bills, which provide the necessary framework to address this pressing issue.

The City of South Portland is home to 7 facilities that store and transfer petroleum products ranging from crude oil to gasoline. My department has trained and prepared for emergencies at these facilities for decades and has a cache of equipment and foam concentrate that we have responded with state-wide. Not only do we, as a department, maintain a supply of foam concentrate, we also require our terminals to maintain a foam supply for our use within their facilities, and as part of a mutual aid understanding. At our last count, approximately 10,000 gallons of PFAS-containing AFFF foam were present in our city, including both our department's stock and the supply maintained at these facilities.

The dangers of PFAS chemicals are well-documented and widely acknowledged. These chemicals, a key component in legacy Aqueous Film-Forming Foam (AFFF), have been linked to a range of serious health issues, including cancer, immune system dysfunction, and developmental problems.

Fire departments across Maine have been aware of the gravity of the PFAS issue for several years and while some have departments like mine have taken proactive steps to eliminate these harmful substances from their operations, these efforts come at a significant cost and without the assistance of a centralized and comprehensive path for us to meet this challenge.

My own department recently spent \$72,000 for synthetic, fluorine-free foam to replace our legacy AFFF stock. This represents a significant financial commitment and reflects our dedication to safeguarding the health and safety of our firefighters and our community.

However, our transition to PFAS-free foam has created a new challenge: the safe and responsible disposal of our 3,000 gallons of PFAS-containing foam. In addition to the disposal of the foam itself, we are also grappling with the costly and complex process of decontaminating vehicles and storage tanks that may have been exposed to PFAS.

Although we have purchased replacement foam concentrate, we have delayed taking delivery until FY 26, when we anticipate securing funding for the disposal of our legacy stock and the decontamination of our fleet. Without a state-supported program, many departments, particularly smaller or rural ones, may struggle to afford this transition, leaving these hazardous materials in use or improperly stored.

Right now, we do not even have a complete understanding of how much PFAS-containing foam remains in use across Maine. LD 400 would provide that crucial information, allowing us to assess the full scale of the problem and develop an effective response to ensure that all fire departments across Maine have the resources and support they need to address this challenge effectively.

LD 222, which proposes a take-back program for the disposal of PFAS-containing foam, is equally important. This program would provide a clear and consistent pathway for the safe and responsible disposal of this hazardous material, preventing improper disposal practices that could lead to further environmental contamination and public health risks.

Maine's firefighters have dedicated their lives to protecting the public. It is our duty to protect them in return. By supporting LD 400 and LD 222, we can provide fire departments with the tools and resources they need to transition away from PFAS-containing foam safely and responsibly. We can safeguard the health and well-being of our firefighters, protect our communities from the dangers of PFAS exposure, and ensure a cleaner and healthier environment for future generations.

I urge you to support LD 400 and LD 222 so that Maine fire departments are not left to manage this crisis alone. These bills provide essential steps to ensure we protect our firefighters, our communities, and our environment from the long-term harm of PFAS. We need a statewide solution, and we need it now

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.